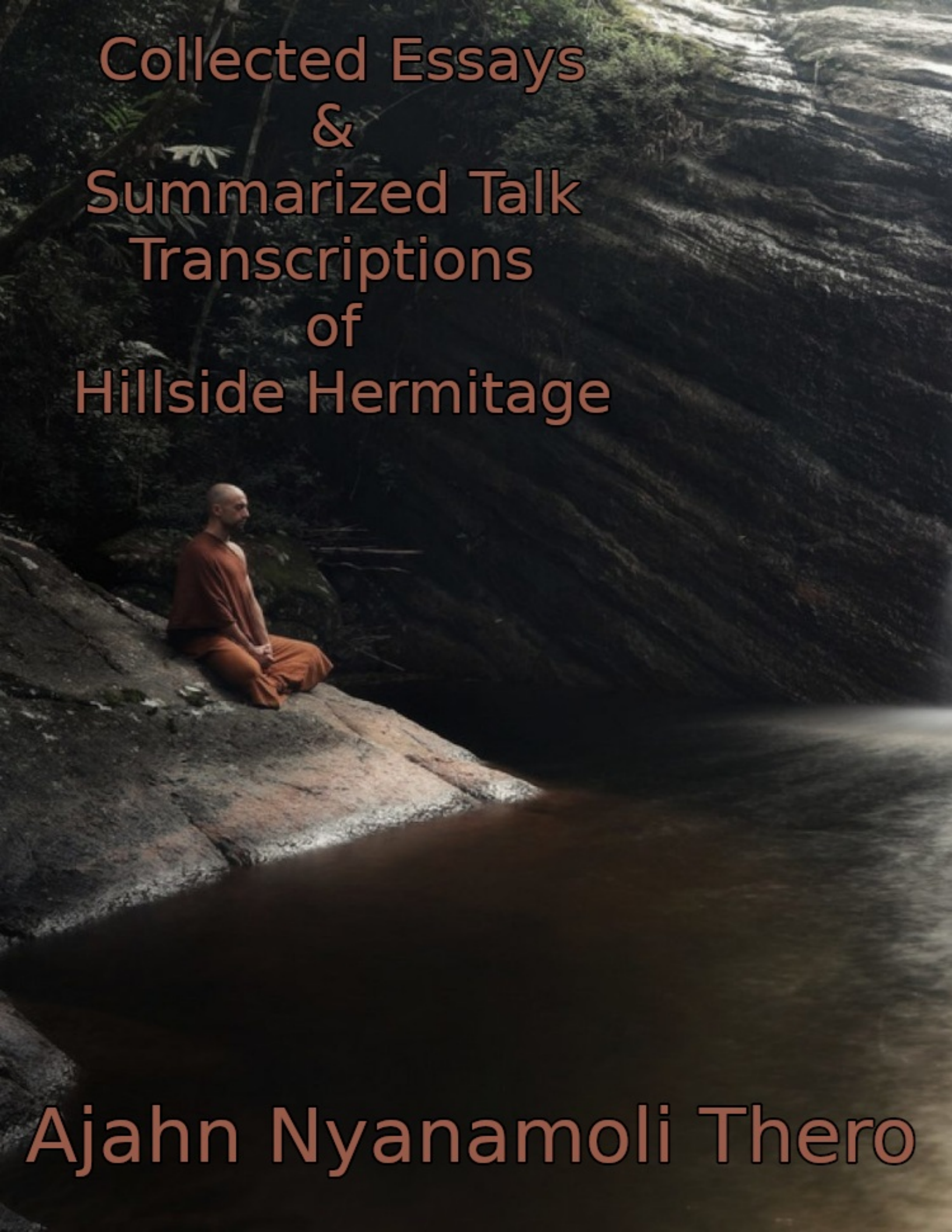
Collected Essays & Summarized Talk Transcriptions of Hillside Hermitage



Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

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&
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of
Hillside Hermitage

by

Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

Explanation

This epub ebook was created so I could conveniently read the various essays freely published as PDFs by Hillside Hermitage. I am making it public in the assumption others will find value in this collection of texts in an epub format. This collection will be updated as new texts are made available.

Thanks to Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero and Thaniyo Thero for their generosity in sharing the dhamma.

Sources:

Meanings: Essays and Letters on Dhamma

Articles by Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

Hillside Hermitage Podcast

Essays

Feelings are Suffering

How should one free oneself from suffering?

The very first step that one should make is to learn how not to *crave* the cessation of suffering. At first glance this might seem simple, but actually it is not so straightforward at all; for we cannot assume that an untrained, ordinary person even knows what truly suffering is.

In order to know *dukkha* it is not enough just to suffer. To know *dukkha*, one has to recognize, within the present experience, what *is* and what *is not* necessary. The point is that, in the experience of pain, certain aspects are inevitable, while others, are not. In different words – the 'painfulness' of pain is suffering and not the pain itself.

Let me get back to the opening statement that one should not crave the cessation of suffering; why is that essential? The *immediate reason* of our suffering, as the Buddha tells us, is our craving or *taṇha*. It is because of *taṇha* that our experience of pain is *painful*. This applies to the other two kinds of feeling too. Thus, we can say, that it is because of craving that *feelings* are *dukkha*. In the first type, unpleasant feeling, craving for the *cessation* of that feeling causes one to suffer: the painful feeling is present there, directly opposed to one's desire for it to not-be, to disappear. In this way a discrepancy is created, a discrepancy which is nothing but *dukkha*. In the second type, pleasant feeling, craving for *more* of that feeling is manifested, thus the *actual* pleasant feeling appears as unpleasant, when attended from the direction of that increased pleasure which is *craved*

for. The present feeling of pleasure becomes inadequate, a lack which needs to be satisfied. Again, the discrepancy arises, which one tries to overcome by a further pursuit of various things in the world which, will *intensify* his pleasure further. One hopes that such attempt will 'fill the gap' within, but needless to say, that is impossible since the discrepancy is actually being constantly *generated* by the presence of *taṇha*, and *not* by the various objects in the world.

> **"Thought and lust are a man's sensuality,**
> **Not the various things in the world;**
> **Thought and lust are a man's sensuality,**
> **The various things just stand there in the world;**
> **But the wise get rid of desire therein."**
>
> – AN VI 63 / iii, 411

> **When it comes to third type, neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feelings (i.e. neutral), suffering is experienced as a result of one craving *for feelings* themselves, since neutral feeling is not recognized at all:**
>
> **"Neutral feeling is pleasant when known [as such], and unpleasant when not-known [as such]"**
>
> – MN 44 / i, 303

So, to summarize, one's experience of pain is *not* the reason for one's suffering. It is rather the presence of craving, in one's experience, that suffering *is there*. As long as this remains the case, one will be a "victim" of one's own feelings, be they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

Existence Means Control

In order for something to exist (*bhava*), in order for it to be, in a full and appropriated sense, that thing has to be given first, in the form of an experience as a whole. When I say ‘given’, this should be understood in the sense that we can only “find” things as already being there, in the world. (Cf. Sartre’s statement in *Being & Nothingness* that every thing comes *with* past). The fact is that things can only be found when they are attended to and this means that – fundamentally speaking – they are *beyond* one’s control[1]: one is not their *creator*. Thus, one’s experience as a whole *cannot* be controlled; the most a person can do is to modify an already given state of affairs, on a more particular level.

Take the five-aggregates as an example: their nature is to appear, disappear, and change while standing, at *their own accord*. It is only with *upādāna* that this characteristic is obscured[2], and in such cases the apparent Self becomes the fundamental agent of the process instead, or at least this is how it appears to a *puthujjana*. One who is not free from *upādāna*, and the Self-view, confuses the fact that the five-aggregates (or in this case the five-holding-aggregates) *can* be modified or affected once they arise, with the notion that they are controlled. This notion of control also supports (or feeds) the view that ‘Self’ is their creator, which in return feeds that notion, and so on indefinitely. This is why with ‘Self’ there comes the perception of *mastery* over one’s experience – *"Attā*, ‘self’, is fundamentally a notion of *mastery over things*." (Ñāṇavīra Thera, *Notes on Dhamma*, DHAMMA)

The Self then, as a “master”, appears as something different, something *apart* from the five-holding-aggregates. Furthermore, the Self keeps finding proof for its existence by constantly interfering and modifying (when possible) the arisen states of the five-holding-aggregates. The Self finds pleasure in doing so.

On the other hand, if the Self would see that, despite all of the proof, its mastery actually *requires* (or *directly depends* upon) the five-aggregates, the notion of control would cease[3]. It becomes clear that ‘Self’ cannot possibly exercise any fundamental control over their appearing, disappearing, and change while standing. This is why by contemplating this long enough, one can become an *arahat*:

> **“Then, monks, at another time the Buddha Vipassī dwelt contemplating the appearing and disappearing of the five-holding-aggregates… And as he remained contemplating the appearing and disappearing of the five-holding-aggregates, before long his mind was freed from the fetters without remainder.”**
>
> – Mahāpadāna Sutta, DN 14 / ii, 35

1. Even if one can control them, first they have to be. In other words – the nature of control is seen as something beyond our control.↩

2. As a matter of fact, it’s not only the characteristic that is obscured, the five-aggregates are not seen either, most of the time.↩

3. For a puthujjana it is not enough to see this once. It is only with the repetition of this insight (achieved through effort), that the habitual view of control will disappear, and be replaced (gradually too) with the view of an inherent lack of control – the view of impermanence. When it is seen that impermanence underlies every project of the Self, the Self ceases to be Self, since without its mastery, selfhood cannot stand. (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Notes on Dhamma, PARAMATTHA SACCA, para. 6)↩

With birth, Death applies

1. We are born. We come into this world through our birth. As we shall see in the following paragraphs, there are many ways that one *can* think of one's birth. However, from a phenomenological point of view our birth is always here *with* us. The fact that one is constantly engaged with the world of one's desires, decisions and miseries, means that one is born – his birth is *present*. Obviously, for someone not used to thinking phenomenologically, it might be fairly difficult to pull oneself out of the habitual way of regarding things as something which is clearly defined, something palpable in one's experience. For such a person 'birth' *is* an event from the past, and we shall address this issue in the paragraphs to follow. However, there is also a simpler and easily overlooked reason for one failing to grasp the phenomenological description of 'birth'. In our language the term 'birth', as a designation of experience, carries certain *past* connotations. These connotations are absolutely gratuitous, and we shall see that the reason for that lies in people's *views* (*diṭṭhi*). The established usage of terminology draws its significance (i.e. the meaning of its words) from the most *common* views (on the level of humanity or a particular culture), about the nature of experience. Needless to say, the common views are rarely correct, especially when it comes to the experience of an individual. These views can never represent the real *order of things*. Thus, apart from the way we speak, and use the language, nothing requires us to think that birth can, and shall *only* be understood as a past event which has started and ended *in* time.

2. Naturally, it is possible for one to regard, and understand to a certain extent, birth as something which has happened to him a long time ago, even without having the actual memory of the event. However, this kind of limited understanding is only possible in the *objective* (scientific) *view* of the world, and oneself. We can even go a step further and say that it is precisely *because* of that view that one thinks of birth (and other things, including ageing-and-death) in these temporal categories. With this kind of view, the objective world in front of one, the world which is *in* time, takes precedence over one's experience as such, which is *of* time (cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, *Notes on Dhamma*, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, Dynamic Aspect, para. 5). One starts regarding the objects that appear *through* one's experience, as something more fundamental than the experience itself – he puts second that which is to come first, and he puts first that which is to come second.[1] As a result of this one starts regarding oneself objectively as also being *in* time. Thus, time develops into a category which has become *external* to everything, and all of the things appear as being "within" it[2]. Therefore, one sees that others are born, their event of birth occurs in time, when he observes it externally. But because he views himself externally too, he naturally (i.e. in conformity with his view) comes to assume that his birth has *also* occurred some time ago in the past. One also assumes, since he can see it in his everyday experience, that death *will* happen to him in that same 'external' sense, "as it happens to others all the time". By regarding things in this way, he, as an individual, does not feel threatened by any of it, until the *actual* death comes of course. So, we can see that one doesn't adopt this objective view voluntarily – when *avijjā* is present, the view is developed naturally as the quickest way of offering one

assurance from a threatening world. The world and one's experience becomes explainable and measurable – one has regained *control*.

Let us get back to the phenomenon of 'birth', we were discussing. The Buddha referred to 'birth' as: "Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-being, coming-forth, manifestation of aggregates, and acquisition of [sense] spheres of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth." (Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, M. 9/i 50)

Thus, although we can agree that birth is some sort of a "beginning", so to speak, a "manifestation of the aggregates", what obliges us to think that that beginning has *ended* there? The fact that one keeps accepting and using the five-aggregates, the fact that one is constantly involved with the world of one's senses, doesn't that mean that one's *manifestation* of aggregates is *present*[3]? And would one be able to desire various things in the world, if those things were not manifested? If one were able to relinquish any attachment for his own body, would one be bothered when that body falls apart and dies? It is because one *affirms* that manifestation of the five-aggregates, through desire-and-lust for them, that the manifestation *exists*, it comes-into-being – with being, birth is (*bhavapaccayā jāti*). And when one regards it as 'mine', one ages, falls sick and dies (and also experiences any other misery possible in this life) – with birth, ageing-and-death (*jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ*…). If there is no being whatsoever, would manifestation be able to manifest itself? And if nothing manifested, would one be able to appropriate it? And if there is nothing which belongs to one, would one suffer on account of those things breaking up and disappearing? No, because one has escaped.

3. Let us go back to the question of when birth ends. Actually, we can even ask when does birth start? The common view is that first one is conceived, and than, after nine months or so, things culminate in one being born. But when does the conception take place or when *exactly* is one born? Is it with the formation of an embryo or with cutting of the umbilical cord? Generally, the accepted view is that birth is over when the baby comes out of the womb and into the world. And when it comes to 'general views', we all know that people often tend to blindly comply to them, taking them for granted for the most (or whole) of their lives, without even realizing they are doing so. In this case, 'birth' becomes that which accords to the majority of opinions on that subject. One chooses to conform with "what everyone else thinks", since the majority is "always in the right". One accepts Heidegger's impersonal 'They' as a dictator of one's own values, one finds *safety* in doing so. However, no matter how secure the majority's view might seem, all it takes is for someone else to come along and say (perhaps supporting it with "the latest medical research") that birth actually ends when the formation of an infant is completed in the womb, and that coming out of the mother is not relevant as such, to question of birth itself. (Though, for parents, even if they happen to be those scientists, this is probably *the most* relevant part[4].) If his utterance manages to change the general opinion, if the majority of people come to accept it, we will have a new, "more accurate" view on the nature of birth. The majority might have been wrong earlier, but now it is in the right… until it changes. And one can again choose to conform to that majority and make a choice out of it, but no matter how far one goes that choice will always remain *personal*, and as such, be on the level of *an individual*. So, although one thinks what

everybody else does, one nevertheless remains *responsible* for that very thinking. It becomes clear then that by choosing the majority's opinion on a certain subject (in this case 'birth), out of 'faith' in modern science (or religion) perhaps, a person chooses *his individual view* on given subject. So, by deciding to accept the scientific explanation of birth, one decides that birth, for him, is something observable, an event in the world. Thus, whether one is aware of it or not, one is responsible for the *meaning* of things in one's experience. Even if we go further and say that we could pinpoint the exact *moment* of birth[5], when, for example, conception takes place, and even if the whole of humanity, without an exception, agreed upon it, nevertheless, this would not escape the *nature* of 'view', and that is to be 'imposed' onto things in one's experience, while at the same time directly depending upon them. In our case that would most likely be the 'objective view', which is of course, based on personal preferences and inclinations[6]. Thus, for a *puthujjana* coming-out-of-womb *is that* which is birth. His birth *exists.*

The Buddha, on the other hand, talks about the *nature* of birth, as a phenomena (*dhamma*), in one's experience. He does not refer to birth as an occurrence in time, upon which even *puthujjanas* cannot agree, and this can be seen from the usual *paṭiccasamuppāda* (*p.s.*) description. In this description, *jāti* refers to that 'nature' of birth and any temporal events are completely irrelevant to it. If there is no 'birth' whatsoever, if there is no manifestation (as such) of the aggregates, a *puthujjana* would not be able to regard any event (in this case 'coming-out-of-womb') as *his*[7] birth[8]. Thus, one doesn't suffer on account of birth as an event in the past, one suffers on account of the *nature* of birth in the *present*. In *p.s.* context, 'birth' structurally *precedes* 'ageing-and-death'. 'Ageing-and-

death' is not 'birth', but they wouldn't be without it – together they arise, together they cease. So, it is that with 'birth', 'ageing-and-death' (and 'sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair') *apply*. Consequently, if we were to discuss *jāramaraṇaṃ*, we could say that it is because ageing-and-death is *present*, that one will age and die (and suffer) *in* time. But, if one could manage, through an understanding of the Dhamma, to free oneself from 'being' – to bring it to an end – ' birth' and 'ageing-and-death' would cease to exist for him: all of the temporal occasions for suffering would cease to be *his* suffering, since by not-being born, one doesn't have the desire to interfere with them any more – one is free.

5. Let me just say something more, for those who find it difficult to accept that the existential (phenomenological) method[9] can validly be applied to Dhamma. We can put aside Sartre, Heidegger and those like them, and disregard what they have to say about birth. However, even in that case, still, we need look no further than the *p.s.* description in order to see what the Buddha meant by 'birth'. In Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, M. 9/i 50, it is said, as we already referred to it earlier on:

When a noble disciple has thus understood birth, the origin of birth, the cessation of birth, and the way leading to the cessation of birth… he here and now makes an end of suffering. In that way too a noble disciple is one of right view… and has arrived at this true Dhamma.

Thus, a Noble disciple, an *ariyasāvaka*, can by understanding 'birth', in the same sense that he would have understood the Four Noble Truths – directly and timelessly – free oneself and become an *arahat*. So, one may rightly ask now: would this be

possible, if ‘birth’ were not already somehow *present*[10], as a phenomena, in our experience? How would one be able to understand birth directly and without involving time? If one’s birth was indeed a distant event, in some maternity ward perhaps, one’s fate would be sealed according to the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, since the event of birth has already passed and cannot possibly be understood directly. Fortunately, one’s birth is not *in* the past, so one can, if one chooses to follow the Buddha’s Teaching, cease to, in the present, regard ‘birth’ as his and by doing so remove himself from the domain of ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. One can escape.

1. Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his Phenomenology of Perception, (Routledge Classics, 2007, p. 82): I detach myself from my experience and pass to the idea. Like the object, the idea purports to be the same for everybody, valid in all times and places, and the individuation of an object in an objective point of time and space finally appears as the expression of a universal positing power. I am no longer concerned with my body, nor with time, nor with the world, as I experience them in antepredicative knowledge, in the inner communion that I have with them. I now refer to my body only as a idea, to the universe as idea, to the idea of space and the idea of time. Thus ‘objective’ thought (in Kierkegaard’s sense) is formed – being that of common sense and of science – which finally causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and the natural sequel. The whole life of consciousness is characterized by the tendency to posit objects, since it is consciousness, that is to

say self-knowledge, only in so far as it takes hold of itself and draws itself together in an identifiable object. And yet the absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it.↩

2. Time, as a phenomena in one's experience, is regarded as more primordial (read – 'permanent'), than the experience of things. The things seem to come and go, while the sense of time stays.↩

3. Furthermore, nothing obliges us to think that 'manifestation of aggregates' refers to the event of coming-out-of-womb. The Buddha has said that "when mother and father come together and the mother is in season and the one to be tied is present, with the coming together of these three things, there is descent into the womb" (M. 38/i 265-66). Thus, the five-aggregates are already manifested, in a way, even at the stage of an embryo, and before the infant is formed. (Cf. also A.III, 61/i, 176-7)↩

4. And therefore it is not accidental that this is most commonly regarded as birth.↩

5. This, in itself, is clearly impossible, since the "exactness", in any area of science, is determined by the capacities of one's perception (i.e. the refinement of our technology and observational instruments). (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Notes on Dhamma, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, Static Aspect, para. 16.)↩

6. It is very unlikely that the whole of humanity could actually agree on this (or anything), since all people are not the

same. The birth of a baby, in this case, carries different significance for different individuals. A mother might say that her baby was born the moment she held it in her arms, and that it was conceived the moment she fell in love with its father. A scientist, in his carefully cultivated attitude of disinterestedness, might say that a baby is conceived when embryo cells become discernible (he observes it under his microscope!), and perhaps that it is born when it starts to breathe independently. For a doctor, involved in performing abortions, there is no question of 'baby' (i.e. 'human'), until three months are due. Thus, it is how one feels towards 'birth', how one perceives it, how one intends it, that determines what that birth is for him. ("Contacted, monks, one feels; contacted, one intends; contacted, one perceives." – Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta, iv,10.) Also, compare the passage from the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta, M. 18/i 111-112: Dependent on the eye and forms (ear, nose…) eye consciousness arise. The meeting of three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling. What man feels, that he perceives. What he perceives, that he thinks about. What he thinks about that he diversifies. With what he diversified as the source calculations about perceptions of diversification occupy a man with respect to past, future and present.↩

7. Compare this passage from J.P. Sartre – Existentialism is Humanism, chapter on 'Freedom and Responsibility': Yet I find an absolute responsibility for the fact that my facticity (here the fact of my birth) is directly inapprehensible and even inconceivable, for this fact of my birth never appears as a brute fact but always across a projective reconstruction of my for-itself. I am ashamed of being born

or I rejoice over it, or in attempting to get rid of my life I affirm that I live and I assume this life as bad. Thus in a certain sense I choose to be born. This choice itself is integrally affected with facticity since I am not able not to choose, but this facticity in turn will appear only in so far as I surpass it toward my ends. Thus facticity is everywhere, but inapprehensible; I never encounter anything except my responsibility. That is why I can not ask, “Why was I born?” or curse the day of my birth or declare that I did not ask to be born, for these various attitudes towards my birth – i.e., toward the fact that I realize a presence in the world – are absolutely nothing else but ways of assuming this birth in full responsibility and of making it mine.↩

8. This can be stated even more precisely: the temporal things (events in time) are possible only because there is an atemporal structure (nature of time) – time is secondary to one’s experience. Hence, the p.s. is said to be akālika, ‘timeless’. (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Notes on Dhamma, NP. & FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE). That is why, in the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, M. 9, we can see that a Noble disciple can, by understanding ‘being’, ‘birth’ or ‘ageing-and-death’ respectively, come to the same result – complete freedom from suffering, arahatship. P.s. can be understood by understanding all or any of its “pairs”, since each of them represent, or rather are, the principle of simultaneous dependent origination – ‘when this, this is’ (imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti).↩

9. We are not interested in the conclusions (or lack of them, as Ven. Ñāṇavīra would say) they drew from the method

itself.↩

10. Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, op. cit., NP., para. 9 & 10. This ‘somehow’ is important to note. If a puthujjana, who is not satisfied with the idea of birth being something which occurred in his past, admits that there has to be some other way in which ‘birth’ can be present, and if he admits that he doesn’t see that way, he might make the effort to find it out, and than eventually see it.↩

Appearance and Existence

For a *puthujjana* the world exists. He can perceive things in that world, see them appear and disappear, he can see them changing. A *puthujjana* can also affect his surroundings and modify things according to own preferences, pursue the desirable experiences and avoid the undesirable ones—the *puthujjana* is *involved*. This 'involvement' with things represents the very core of the *puthujjana*'s 'experience as a whole'. Most people spend the majority of their lives obliviously absorbed in it, taking the course of 'involvement' for granted.[1]

It needs to be understood that these 'objects', which the *puthujjana* is fundamentally involved with, are *things* which his experience is inseparable from, for the simple virtue of being *his experience of those things.* For this reason we have to broaden the meaning of the term 'things', from usually denominating 'objects' in one's surroundings, to include *any* experience whatsoever that arises and can be discerned internally or externally (whether it is 'objects', 'tools', emotions' or 'thoughts'). In that way the term 'things' would correspond to what is meant by Pāli term *'dhamma'*. Thus, the experience of the *puthujjana*'s everyday world, his possessions, his desires and fears, anxieties and happiness are all *things* or *phenomena*. All these phenomena are completely *unknown* in their *nature*. This is why it is crucial for a *puthujjana* to recognize that a nature of a thing *exists.* This existence is not 'in' the world of the objects that are ready-to-hand, not 'in' his mind, not even between the two—but, a thing exists as an *experience*. Strictly speaking that's all that can be truthfully said, without resorting to presupposed theories, inductive observations and

explanations of the experience—the only thing that a *puthujjana* can know for certain is that 'there is an experience'. In this way it can be seen that a thing *is*, its 'being' appears and things such as pleasure, pain, emotional states, ideas, abstractions etc. that people have in their everyday lives, are in this way all *real*, they all come to exist as something that is there, that has *appeared*. No matter how ordinary or extraordinary one's experience is or might be, whether it is common or unusual, that experience exists *as such*. Even if one is going through the most obscure, ambiguous states of one's mind, those very states are valid in their nature (as obscure, as ambiguous); whether they are intimate and subjective or the most impersonal objective facts—they are all *phenomena*, they constitute the experience as a whole (which is also a *phenomenon*).

"We do not *know* what 'Being' means. But even if we ask, 'What *is* "Being"?', we keep within an understanding of the 'is', though we are unable to fix conceptually what that 'is' signifies. We do not even know the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed. *But this vague average understanding of Being is still a Fact.*

However much this understanding of Being (an understanding which is already available to us) may fluctuate and grow dim, and border on mere acquaintance with a word, its very indefiniteness is itself a positive phenomenon which needs to be clarified.[2]

The same is to be said for the even more complex categories of the *puthujjana*'s world, such as 'actions', 'choices', notions of 'good' and 'bad' and similar. They are not exempt from the

phenomenological nature of things. Good or bad, skilful or not, these things *manifest* in one's experience, and as such: they are real.

A very common passage from the Suttas which describes that which is known as the 'mundane' Right View:

> *Atthi dinnaṃ, atthi yiṭṭhaṃ, atthi hutaṃ, atthi sukatadukkaṭānaṃ kammānaṃ phalaṃ vipāko, atthi ayaṃ loko, atthi paro loko, atthi mātā, atthi pitā, atthi sattā opapātikā, atthi loke samaṇabrāhmaṇā sammaggatā sammāpaṭipannā ye imañca lokaṃ parañca lokaṃ sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedentī'ti*
>
> **"There is what is given and what is offered and what is sacrificed; there is fruit and result of good and bad actions; there is this world and the other world; there is mother and father; there are spontaneously reborn beings; there are in the world good and virtuous recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world."**
>
> – MN 117 / iii, 72

This easily overlooked passage offers a very acute description of an *authentic* attitude of a *puthujjana*—the attitude of recognition and acknowledgment of the existence of things *as* phenomena ("*there is…")*. Someone might argue that one does not necessarily see the spontaneously reborn beings for example, but the point is that one should recognize the mere fact that there *could be* spontaneously reborn beings—the *possibility* of spontaneously reborn beings *exists* as such. And if

one recognizes the validity of the appearance and existence of that possibility, an *expectation of the concrete proof* that can be obtained only through *senses* (i.e. one needs to *see* those beings) ceases to be relevant, in the same way that a view that a thing exists only if it can be experienced through the senses ceases. This attitude thus discloses the *priority* of the *phenomenal nature of things* (of one's experience), over any other view which does not assert that priority. And it is because of this very lack of the correct priority that these kinds of views are *wrong views* (as far as freedom from suffering is concerned). Thus, whatever one's experience is, whichever shape it might take—big or small, important or not, clear or ambiguous—that experience is *there* in its own phenomenological form. This by no means implies that such experience is necessarily understood, it simply means that it is recognized for what it is, even if that is as"something-which-is-not-understood". This kind of 'acknowledgement' is the authenticity that we also find the existential philosophers often referring to. Together with authenticity, there comes the sense of the *fundamental responsibility* for one's own existence[3] which is a necessary prerequisite for a *puthujjana*'s 'mundane' Right View)[4] (which can then lead further onwards toward the 'supramundane' Right View—the view of the Path). The reason why this attitude is a necessary prerequisite is because only with this attitude will a *puthujjana* be able to *understand* that he *does not understand*, and by doing so enable himself for understanding."[5] The problem is, however, that if a common man denies that which is right in front of him in his day-to-day living, he denies the basic principles of his own experience. In other words he is denying the most immediate *appearance* of things. This results in phenomena not being seen at all. As long

as this attitude persists that man is going to be deprived of the possibility of understanding the nature of the experience and consequently the nature of his own suffering. That man is *inauthentic*.[6] As the experience shows us this is all too easily done. All that is required is to simply never question the face value of one's views of the world and the experience and to never look further from one's immediate absorption in things.

For inauthentic man, when he does think about the nature of his experience and the world around him, his views would generally pertain to a common notion of a *hidden reality* behind the everyday world (either material or mental, depending on the direction his mind takes). What is meant by this is that he simply *assumes* that there is something *more* real or fundamental in relation to what he is or can experience. Simply put, if he was to assume a 'mental' type of reality, as something which underlies the present experience, he would fall into (one of the forms of) *idealism*; alternatively, if the reality was to have a more 'material' basis, he would fall into some form of *materialism* (or *realism*).[7] Either way, the *puthujjana* oscillates between the two.[8]

For example, in present times, a spiritual/mystical view of the hidden 'Reality' (one's 'true Self', or 'universal consciousness') would be a form of idealism, while the very common and prevalent scientific objectification of the experience would most certainly come under materialism. These two can serve as the two prominent poles of the Wrong View spectrum.[9] These views differ from the Right View because as they are focused on developing and providing *explanations* of the nature of one's experience, while failing to see that fundamentally they are *derived from it*. No matter how plausible and accurate a theory

or an explanation of the origins and nature of the experience is, the fact is that experience, as a phenomenon, will always *have to* come *first*. This means that the explanation cannot be applied *retrospectively* to describe its own origin which is *simultaneously present.* Nevertheless, by maintaining this contradiction (which is an *assumption*) the actual *structural order* of the experience is assumed *different*. And since that's all a *puthujjana* has in front of him, that *assumed nature* of the experience *exists as such*. Because of this, the nature of a wrong view is to provide a man with reasons and causes, which achieves nothing except concealing and contradicting the notion of the immediate appearance of things and one's own existential responsibility. When Reality is hidden behind the appearances, which are then no more than 'illusory', whatever a *puthujjana* does and whatever he feels ceases to be *relevant*, even if it's the most immediate and personal suffering. If it isn't irrelevant just yet, a person with this kind of view will certainly strive in order to make it so by blending it into the all-embracing view that the world is nothing more than illusion, and as such whatever comes to be experienced in that world is disregarded because it doesn't belong to Reality. Consequently, by not pertaining to Reality, the things in one's environment can be ignored, and one will feel justified in doing so. Thus, for a *puthujjana* of this kind, things encountered in everyday life don't fit into his *view of reality*—they are dismissed, they are *not understood*.[10] In the view of scientific objectification on the other hand, the *puthujjana*'s actions are neatly explained in terms of various collections of nerve impulses, reflexes, genes, sensations and so on. In this case the significance of one's actions cannot extend beyond the threshold of the molecular compounds of one's body, which then serves as the *reason* (or

excuse) for the *puthujjana*'s desires, emotions, concerns etc.[11] In both types of views the responsibility for the immediate intentions and decisions is abolished, by way of being included in the mystical or molecular forms (for example "God's Will" or genetic "predispositions")—which serve to explain one's world. In either case that responsibility is not *felt*, its *nature* is *disowned*. (Might this perhaps be the *real purpose* of these views?) Thus, the inauthenticity remains for as long as there is a view which places itself *over* the existence as such, as something which is more primordial in itself: the Reality *behind* or *beneath* the appearance, the molecular structure of the world, again—*beneath* the things in the way we encounter them in the world. Consequently, things like 'good' or 'bad', 'results' (of one's actions), 'being reborn', 'sacrifice', 'other world' and so on[12] have no place in one's experience.[13] As such, they become very ambiguous categories of one's life, which an individual can choose to accept and believe in, or perhaps reject according to his personal choice. (The overall decline of morality in the world indicates which kind of choice prevails.) In this way these things are pushed in the domain of religion and ethics and regarded as 'convictions' and 'observances' that one can follow if one pleases.

Thus, whenever the priority of existence is not recognized, the *nature* of things is obscured. Clearly the practice of Dhamma is then out of the question. Nevertheless, for a *puthujjana* the possibility of seeing the structural priority of existence as a whole over the particular instances his Self derives from it, still remains, and only when he admits this, the real work can begin.

The Appearance in Its Priority

So, with the mystical view on one end, and the objective, scientific one on the other, the recognition of one's personal existence cannot arise. Because of these inauthentic attitudes, which are nevertheless *normal* attitudes of the *puthujjana*'s everyday life, it would be correct to say that for him things don't even *exist*, in a correct sense of that word. Only with the development of the rudimentary notions of authenticity, through the practice of mindfulness and restraint and reflection, can a *puthujjana* begin to notice, little by little, the nature of his experience as a whole—*phenomena* can start to *appear*. It is only in this way that one can understand what is meant by the 'being' of things, which is nothing fundamentally different than the 'being' of myself.[14] Through the establishing of authenticity a *puthujjana* can observe that things around him, and his experience as a whole, appear and disappear. In the beginning it seems like this is happening while his *sense of the experience as a whole* stays *unchanged*. This 'unchangedness' holds priority over the *puthujjana*'s experience, and that's because in its nature it presents itself as something which is remaining the *same* or *independent* (i.e. unchanging) throughout the appearance of things which comes and goes. It looks as if things that appear are 'included' within that general non-changing sense of the experience. The appearance of things —or, simply, things *belong* to it. Although there is no concealed 'Being' behind that which appears since the basic authenticity has been established, this nevertheless results in the notion that fundamentally things *are*, and *that is why* they appear. Thus, 'Being' is assumed to be an ontological phenomenon that manifests itself *through* the 'appearance'. One might not be able to find it apart from appearance, but nevertheless, a *puthujjana* thinks—"things exist, that's why they can appear". In this way

one assumes the ontological priority of existence over the appearance. Thus, a *puthujjana* places 'being' as that which is *first*. This type of priority of 'being', is the necessary basis for the *puthujjana*'s sense of 'Self'. The notion of constancy, the unchanging nature of the experience as a whole, the independence, is the "extra-temporal changeless 'self"'[15] of the *puthujjana.* '(The being of) Self' is then the reason for things to appear ,they are appearing *for* it.[16] This arrangement, this *particular [dis]order* of things is also called: *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*.

If, presumably, a *puthujjana* wants to abandon this view, which is the root of all suffering, the authentic pursuit must continue. What he has to see is that this notion of 'Self', despite its independent character, also *appears*. No matter how elusive or ambiguous it might be—it has to be seen as such: as an elusive thing. Only after this is it is possible for a *puthujjana* to see that the order of things imposed by the presence of an assumed 'extra-temporal' phenomena in his experience is the *wrong order*. Based on things' appearance, and based on the sense of the experience as a whole, there is no justifiable reason for him to assume any primacy of the sense of unchangeability any longer. *There is* 'the sense of unchangeability' and that too *appears*. Thus, the unchanging '(sense of) being' was, in a wholly gratuitous manner, given priority over the appearance of things by being assumed as something which does not appear. The reason for this was simply because this notion of priority was never *noticed*.[17] If a *puthujjana* sees this *existing* notion that *appears*, (which is *that*, which is his 'Self'), a sight of inseparability between 'existence' and 'appearance' will emerge. If a thing exists, that is because it appears; if it appears, that is it exists. Neither the appearance nor existence can be discerned or conceived without each other, and that is what is

meant by “to be is to be perceived”—*esse est percipi*. At this phase, the assumption of a hidden reality *behind* the appearance is almost inconceivable. The *puthujjana* understands that if anything is to exist, it *has to* appear.[18]

Thus, one’s authenticity grows. The attitude has undergone a considerable change, from a *puthujjana* not even being aware of his own existence, over the notion that things appear *because* they exist, up to now, where ‘to appear’ and ‘to exist’ means just the same. Although this is certainly far better than anything before, nevertheless this attitude doesn’t quite yet free the *puthujjana* from suffering. He has to continue, but this is as far as he can go on his own. No matter how hard he tries to understand the existence, any attempt to do so will throw him onto the appearance, and *vice versa*—whenever he looks at the appearance all he is going to see is the existence. In one way or another, the *puthujjana* will not be able to prevent himself from falling into a view that ‘appearance’ and ‘existence’ are the *same*,[19] or—since the difference is perceived between them—he might think that they are *different*.[20] But then the ‘sameness’ is still there, so perhaps they are *both-the-same-and-different*. Consequently, he can negate the whole thing and think that they are *neither-the-same-nor-different*. In either case, he remains *ignorant* in regard to the two; he remains a *puthujjana*. If he is to change this, he needs help from the *outside*; it has to come to him *externally*. The *puthujjana* is not able (i.e. it is structurally impossible) to “step out” of his experience, and see his situation of ‘being-a-*puthujjana*’ as a whole. No matter how far he steps back, he carries his ignorance with him. Only coming across the Buddha’s Teaching can offer him an *outside*

perspective of himself, which if cultivated can 'turn him' into a non-*puthujjana*.[21]

The Teaching tells him that 'existence' cannot be conceived anywhere *apart from* 'appearance', but also that it is *not* 'appearance' as such; furthermore, and even more importantly, it also tells him that 'existence' does not depend on 'appearance' directly, it depends on the 'assumption' (*upādāna*)[22] *in regard to* that which appears,[23] and this means nothing else then that the appearance, for its appearing, *does not require* existence at all—it is actually better *without it*.[24]

> *Na kho, āvuso visākha, taññeva upādānaṃ te pañcupādānakkhandhā, nāpi aññatra pañcahupādānakkhandhehi upādānaṃ. Yo kho, āvuso visākha, pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu chandarāgo taṃ tattha upādānan"ti*
>
> **"The five assumed aggregates, friend Visākha, are not just assuming; but neither is there assumption apart from the five assumed aggregates. That, friend Visākha, in the five assumed aggregates which is desire-&-lust, that assumption is therein."**
>
> – MN 44 / i, 299-300

Thus this inquiry has passed 'through' the *puthujjana*'s 'being', which must not be either denied (dismissed) or justified (explained), but established as a *phenomenon.* It was seen that this phenomenon, far from being a reason because of which things appear, actually depends on the *puthujjana's assumption* in regard to *that which appears*. In the beginning, the *puthujjana*'s existence was a mere fact, of which he was barely

aware and this fact represented his thoroughly inauthentic Self. However, now his existence has not only 'appeared' for him, it was seen that 'existence' cannot even be conceived *without* that which appears. In this way the roles were slowly reversed and the priority of existence over the appearance of things has faded. Now, with the Buddha's aid, a *puthujjana* can further see that actually the existence is not that which appears—it never was. It is the appearance that *exists*, by him *assuming* it (or by being *ignorant* in regard to it.) The existence, in order to be, requires *maintaining* (hence *upādānapaccāya bhavo*). In this way a new perspective has emerged on the relationship between existence and appearance, which reveals that, initially, the *puthujjana* had the whole picture upside-down. The further pursuit of this principle would simply carry further right through the center of *puthujjana*'s being (who at that point would cease to be a *puthujjana*) and complete the 'reversal' of this inverted experience of his, in the same manner as one would turn a sleeve inside-out. At that point that *individual*'s Being would cease without remainder.

1. "Husserl attempts to make the natural attitude descriptively evident by pointing out that our everyday way of going about our business—dealing with things of all sorts, other people, engaged in scientific activities, recreation, and so on – involves various modalities of"belief." I simply take for granted that what I am dealing with exists and is, more or less, as it presents itself as being. Furthermore, "other actual objects are there for me as determinate, as more or less well known, without being themselves perceived or, indeed, present in any other mode of intuition" (Husserl 1982: 51)—that is, they belong within

a co-intended horizon of “indeterminate actuality” (Husserl 1982:52)."—‘The Blackwell Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism’, Husserlian Phenomenology (by Simon Crowell), p. 19.↩

2. Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, translated by J. Macquarrie and E.S. Robinson. London: SCM Press, 1962, p. 25.↩

3. A rather inspired observation of Walter Kaufmann, a distinguished Nietzsche scholar and translator, in his book Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 46: "...perhaps the most compassionate and venerable of all mortals, the Buddha. . . [had said that] all man’s alibis are unacceptable: no gods are responsible for his condition; no original sin; no heredity and no environment; no race, no caste, no father, and no mother; no wrong-headed education, no governess, no teacher; not even an impulse or a disposition, a complex or a childhood trauma. Man is free; but his freedom does not look like the glorious liberty of the Enlightenment; it is no longer the gift of God. Once again, man stands alone in the universe, responsible for his condition, likely to remain in a lowly state, but free to reach above the stars."↩

4. "There is fruit and result of good and bad action...", i.e.: "I am responsible for what I do". Similarly, "there are... recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves the direct knowledge..." means "Freedom from suffering is possible, and if I don’t pursue it, I, myself, am responsible for that. By not pursuing it I am responsible for remaining

there where suffering can arise—I am responsible for my suffering."↩

5. “It is far better for a man to understand that he does not understand the Dhamma, than it is for him to believe falsely that he does understand it. The former attitude may encourage progress, the latter can only obstruct it.”—CtP, pp. 57-58.↩

6. For more on the everyday phenomenon of ‘inauthenticity’ see Hedigger, Being and Time, and J-P. Sartre, Being and Nothingess, particularly the chapter on ‘Bad Faith’. See also the following lines from Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript (p. 311): “Science organizes the moments of subjectivity within a knowledge of them, and this knowledge is assumed to be the highest stage, and all knowledge is an abstraction which annuls existence, a taking of the objects of knowledge out of existence. In existence, however, such a principle does not hold. If thought speaks deprecatingly of the imagination, imagination in its turn speaks deprecatingly of thought; and likewise with the feeling. The task is not to exalt the one at the expense of the other, but to give them an equal status, to unify them in simultaneity; the medium in which they are unified is existence.”↩

7. Ven. Ñāṇavīra observes: “There is, however, another point: an oriented world (which is the meaning of loka in the Suttas) is the correlative of a point of view (there is a SN Sutta that specifically identifies the world with the eye, ear, nose, and so on), and consequently to deny self is to deny the world, and to assert self is to assert the world (so loko so

attā). Thus we have the following scheme: Sassatavāda Assert a point of view; Asserts self— atthi attāti; Assert the world; Denies the objective existence of things— sabbaṃ natthīti Is an Idealist (Bradley, Berkeley) Uccedavāda Denies a point of view; Denies self— natthi attāti; Denies the world; Asserts the objective existence of things— sabbaṃ atthīti Is a Realist (Stebbing, Russell) If this analysis is correct it would explain why a scientist, though apparently asserting the permanence of the Universe, is, in fact, an ucchedavādin—the Universe he asserts is without a point of view, and is the negation of the world (= loka).”— StP, p. 186. Also, cf. DN 2, in particular the Ajita Kesakambalin’s response.↩

8. Cf. StP, p. 323.↩

9. Obviously things can be a bit more complex than this, inasmuch as these opposite views have a lot in common as Merleau-Ponty observes: “We pass from absolute objectivity to absolute subjectivity, but this second idea is not better than the first and is upheld only against it, which means by it. The affinity between intellectualism and empiricism is thus much less obvious and much more deeply rooted than is commonly thought. It arises not only from the anthropological definition of sensation used equally by both, but from the fact that both persist in the natural or dogmatic attitude, and the survival of sensation in intellectualism is merely a sign of this dogmatism. Intellectualism accepts as completely valid the idea of truth and the idea of being in which the formative work of consciousness culminates and is embodied, and its alleged reflection consists in positing as powers of the subject all

that is required to arrive at these ideas. The natural attitude, by throwing me into the world of things, gives me the assurance of apprehending a ‘real’ beyond appearance, the ‘true’ beyond illusion.”—Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 45.↩

10. “To have faith in the Reality of the ‘external world’, whether rightly or wrongly; to”prove" this Reality for it, whether adequately or inadequately; to presuppose it, whether explicitly or not—attempts such as these which have not mastered their own basis with full transparency, presuppose a subject which is proximally worldless or unsure of its world, and which must, at bottom, first assure itself of a world. Thus, from the very beginning, Being-in-a-world is disposed to “take things” in some way [Auffassen], to suppose, to be certain, to have faith—a way of behaving which itself is always a founded mode of Being-in-the-world. The ‘problem of Reality’ in the sense of the question whether an external world is present-at-hand and whether such world can be proved, turns out to be an impossible one, not because its consequences lead to inextricable impasses, but because the very entity which serves as its theme, is one which, as it were, repudiates any such formulation of the question. Our task is not to prove that an ‘external world’ is present-at-hand or to show how it is present-at-hand, but to point out why Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, has the tendency to bury the ‘external world’ in nullity ‘epistemologically’ before going on to prove it. The reason for this lies in Dasein’s falling and in the way in which the primary understanding of Being has been diverted to Being as presence-at-hand—a diversion which is

motivated by that falling itself."—Heidegger, op. cit. p. 250.↩

11. “Behaviour is thus hidden by the reflex, the elaboration and patterning of stimuli, by a longitudinal theory of nervous functioning, which establishes a theoretical correspondence between each element of the situation and an element of the reaction…”The traditional notion of sensation was not a concept born of reflection, but a late product of thought directed towards objects, the last element in the representation of the world, the furthest removed from its original source, and therefore the most unclear. Inevitably science, in its general effort towards objectification, evolved a picture of the human organism as a physical system undergoing stimuli which were themselves identified by their physico-chemical properties, and tried to reconstitute actual perception on this basis, and to close the circle of scientific knowledge by discovering the laws governing the production of knowledge itself, by establishing an objective science of subjectivity…"—Merleau-Ponty, op. cit. pp. 8, & 12.↩

12. Things that are not explainable through the observational methods of inductive sciences.↩

13. “The theory of sensation, which builds up all knowledge out of determinate qualities, offers us objects purged of all ambiguity, pure and absolute, the ideal rather than the real themes of knowledge.”—Merleau-Ponty, op. cit. p. 13.↩

14. A reader might notice here the discrepancy between what I’ve just said and the views one can find in Heidegger’s or Sartre’s works. These philosophers maintain the notion (in

different degrees) of the separation between my being, i. e. the ‘I’, and being of things, the objects of the experience which ‘I’ encounters. For example Sartre developed a fundamental division of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, which he then tried, and consequently failed, to reconcile in Being and Nothingess. In-itself is not more real than for-itself, (i. e. ‘me’ or ‘[my] consciousness’), and the reverse is also true; in order for it to exist it requires for-itself, as much as for-itself requires the in-itself. And it is not possible, in good faith, to think of or regard the in-itself independently of consciousness, nor consciousness independently of the in-itself, not even in one’s imagination. ‘Matter’, rūpa, needs consciousness in order to find its footing in appearance, without it, it is inconceivable. (Cf. the mutually dependent relationship between nāmarūpa and viññāṇa.) In brief: whenever there are things, there is me; whenever there is me, there are things. (Hence one has to understand sabbe dhamma anatta—all things are not-self.) Whether it is ‘being’ of things that we are looking at, or my ‘being’, the point is that there is ‘being’—bhava is there. This is also why, the reader will notice I use ‘existence’ and ‘being’ interchangeably. Whether it is ‘mine’, or not, whether it is personal or impersonal, large or small, visible or invisible, far or near, any ‘being’ whatsoever means that bhava is there; it is, it exists. As long as that is the case, ‘I’ (or at least some degree of the conceit ‘I am’) will be present.↩

15. NoD, ATTĀ.↩

16. “…the phenomenon remains, for”to appear" supposes in essence somebody to whom to appear. "—J.—P. Sartre,

Being and Nothingness, translated by Hazel E. Barnes. London: Methuen, 1957, 1969; New York: Philosophical Library, 1957, p. 2.↩

17. Hence the nature of it also appearing was obscured.↩

18. Sartre (op. cit. , p. 6) seems to have become aware of this, but then chose to disagree: “What determines the being of the appearance is the fact that it appears. And since we have restricted reality to the phenomenon, we can say of the phenomenon that it is as it appears. Why not push the idea to its limit and say that the being of the appearance is its appearing? This is simply a way of choosing new words to clothe the old”Esse est percipi“of Berkeley… It seems that the famous formula of Berkeley cannot satisfy us—for two essential reasons, one concerning the nature of percipi, the other that of the percipere.” Sartre then goes on to construe consciousness into a form of an ‘empty’ absolute which is “pure ‘appearance’ in the sense that it exists only to the degree to which appears.” (op. cit., p. 12). There is no question of things existing to the degree they appear, however there is no such thing as ‘pure appearance’ in the sense of appearance independent of that which has appeared, since every appearance has to be appearance of something. Even if someone says: “Pure appearance”—that designation of that “pure appearance” is that which stands for that which is “pure appearance”, thus that “pure appearance” is not pure—Sartre’s “empty absolute” is thus contradictio in terminis.↩

19. “The first being which we meet in our ontological inquiry is the being of the appearance. Is it itself an appearance?… In

other words, is the being which discloses itself to me, which appears to me, of the same nature as the being of existents which appear to me?”—Sartre, op. cit. p. 4.↩

20. “…the being of the phenomenon can not be reduced to the phenomenon of being.”—Sartre, op. cit. p. 6.↩

21. “The puthujjana’s experience is (saṅkhāra-)dukkha from top to bottom, and the consequence is that he has no way of knowing dukkha for himself; for however much he ‘steps back’ from himself in a reflexive effort he still takes dukkha with him…”“—CtP, p. 482; and on the p. 38 of the same work:”The Dhamma gives the puthujjana the outside view of avijjā, which is inherently unobtainable for him by unaided reflexion (in the ariyasāvaka this view has, as it were, ‘taken’ like a graft, and is perpetually available."↩

22. Upādāna is defined by the PTS Pali-English Dictionary as follows: 1) lit. substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive or going; fuel, supply, provision… 2) ‘drawing upon’, grasping, taking up…; Assumption, assuming according to Chambers Concise Dictionary means: to adopt, to take in, to take upon oneself, to take for granted; [Latin term is assūměre, assumptum: (ad) to (sūměre) take]. The nature of the assumption in general, can be described as follows: the assumption takes its object for granted, and it does so without having a knowledge of whether that thing which is being ‘taken up’ actually is in the way that it is taken up. As a matter of fact, not having a knowledge of this is the fundamental prerequisite for the assumption to manifest, because if the object is known for what it is, there wouldn’t be a need to assume it for what it

is. Knowledge and assumption (vijjā and upādāna) are mutually exclusive. However, upādāna is there (as pañc'upādānakkhandā) which means that the assumption of what the five aggregates are, preceeds that which five aggregates are. In this way the beginingless avijjā puts the assumption first, as something "in front", something more fundamental, that the five aggregates which are taken up. This is done in direct violation of the fact that upādāna cannot be anywhere apart from the five aggregates, that it actually requires them for its existence. Thus, assumption assumes priority over that which is already there. That 'assumed assumption' (or taking for granted that which is taken for granted) becomes the puthujjana's 'norm' of things' existence, it 'measures' them according what it thinks they are, not for what they are. The extent of the assumption determines the extent of this measure (i. e. the existence)— upādānapaccāya bhavo. (Cf. Sartre, op. cit., p. 2: "…then the appearance becomes full positivity; its essence is an 'appearing' which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it.")↩

23. He assumes: "It is the same; it is different; it is both-the-same-and-different; it is neither-the-same-nor-different."↩

24. "Craving, however, is a gratuitous (though beginningless) parasite on the intentional structure described here, and its necessity is not to be deduced from the necessity of intention in all experience. Intention does not imply craving—a hard thing to understand!"—NoD, CETANĀ.↩

Hierarchy of Awareness

The fundamental nature of our experience can be described as a hierarchy, which Ven. Ñāṇavīra tried to explain in his FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE (NoD). We are what we experience, it is not possible to view (or imagine) this hierarchy from 'outside', independent of us, because regardless of how far one steps back, one cannot abandon the experience as such.

The experience, whether mundane or sublime, possesses certain characteristics, and the most prominent among them is that it is *hierarchically ordered*. This hierarchy goes into infinity in both directions, and this is something which can be seen from the nature of *particulars* and *generals*. If we take a look at our own experience as it is, we can see that there are two aspects which appear as being more pronounced than anything else. Those aspects are known as *immediacy* and *reflexion*. Together they comprise this hierarchy of the experience *as a whole*. Thus, the hierarchy we have been referring to can be called *reflexive hierarchy*.[1] If we want to be more precise we can say that immediacy and reflexion, respectively, represent two different modes of experiencing this hierarchy. In immediacy, reflexion is not directly present; it is there, but placed in the background. In reflexion, the immediate object is seen from an *additional point of view*, which means that once we reflect upon something, immediacy *does not* disappear, it rather becomes secondary to the field of attention but, nevertheless, it remains there:

> **"In immediate experience the thing is present; in reflexive experience the thing is again present, but**

> **as implicit in a more general thing. Thus in reflexion the thing is twice present, once immediately and once reflexively. This is true of reflexion both in the loose sense (as reflection or discursive thinking) and *a fortiori* in the stricter sense (for the reason that reflection involves reflexion, though not vice versa). See MANO and also VIÑÑĀṆA." (NoD, ATTĀ (a))**

The presence of this reflexive hierarchy, as can be seen from FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE,[2] generates another dimension to the experience. This dimension is also hierarchically ordered, superimposed upon the original reflexive one; dependent upon it, but at the same time responsible for the existence of it. This simply means that their type of dependence is not temporal, i.e. it does not occur in sequence. This new hierarchy is the *hierarchy of awareness*, and although this hierarchy cannot go 'below' the experience as such (awareness is always awareness of something in-the-world), there is no limit for ascending levels of this hierarchy. As the term 'generating' implies, with the presence of reflexive hierarchy the hierarchy of awareness is also present—*simultaneously*; and as was already said, the existence of this hierarchy, makes the reflexion possible in the first place.

Let us try and say something more about the nature of superimposition, which is relevant for these two hierarchies. When things are *superimposed* they are not *directly* or *linearly* related. They are simply *there*, next to each other and any thought along the lines of *causality* distorts them as they are.[3] This superimposed way of existing is nothing else than what is meant by being *akālika*, 'timeless' or 'beyond time'. Two things are there, dependent, yet not directly related to each other. That

is the reason why we said that with the presence of reflexive hierarchy there is the *presence* of the hierarchy of awareness. This precedes any notions of causality or of time. Nevertheless, if we still insist on describing their mutual relationship, the most accurate way would be to simply say: with reflexion, awareness *is*; without reflexion awareness *is not*. This is clearly a reference to *paṭiccasamuppāda* itself, so now would be the right time to say something more about it.

Paṭiccasamuppāda is *a principle of timeless dependence*, i.e. existential superimposition. With the presence of one thing the other thing is simultaneously present, too. Thus, it is not possible to conceive or imagine *paṭiccasamuppāda* without actually seeing it within the experience, simply because conceiving and imagining, in its nature, *involves sequence* (i.e. it is linear from the point of view of this new hierarchy, and as such pertains solely to the reflexive hierarchy). So, although hierarchy of awareness cannot go 'under' or 'in front' of the immediate-and-reflexive experience, as we noted above, it can always come 'closer' than it is.[4] The point is that these two hierarchies *do not touch* or *overlap*, they are *perpendicular*.[5] When we say 'hierarchy of awareness', this should not be understood in a sense that one is always aware. On the contrary, revealing this hierarchy requires effort, which is being manifested through the practice of mindfulness. Nevertheless, this hierarchy *exists*, and because of that the whole other reflexive hierarchy is possible (see above). The difficulty lies in the fact that this hierarchy cannot be *directly* grasped, and that is because any notions of directionality originate from it.

The description made so far refers to the experience as a whole in an *ideal* sense, i.e. the structure of experience has been described and this structure is the same in *arahant* and *puthujjana*. The difficulty is that the experience is, when we reflect upon it, already affected with ignorance (*avijjā*). Ultimately, ignorance is nothing but the *non-seeing* of the nature of superimposition of the two hierarchies. Things are further complicated by the fact that even reflexive hierarchy is not a simple order of different levels of generality of things; even in this hierarchy, those levels are, in a way, superimposed in relation to each other, and they are all 'kept together', so to speak, by the fact that they can all be *attended* to from the perspective of the hierarchy of awareness. This hierarchy unifies them, determines them or 'keeps them together'. Here we can recognize the nature of determination (*saṅkhāra*), which, as the Suttas tell us, exist through the presence of ignorance (*avijjāpaccayā saṅkhāra*). Thus, when one is not free from igorance, the nature of the hierarchy of awareness is not understood and because of that, that hierarchy will be implicitly taken *par value*, as a kind of owner-creator of the reflexive one, i.e. of our experience. This hierarchy of awareness appears as being *towards* the reflexive hierarchy, as if 'pressing' in the direction of it.[6] Simply by not-seeing that it is directly dependent upon the reflexive hierarchy, this 'pressing' of the hierarchy of awareness is being followed at its face value, and one comes to *assume and accept* that offered ownership over one's own experience,[7], i.e. one comes to assume that there actually *is* Self.

This is perhaps overly-simplified. As we said earlier on, the reflexive hierarchy generates the presence of the hierarchy of awareness. This in return, simultaneously determines reflexive

hierarchy as such. However, since there is no first moment of ignorance being manifested, both of those hierarchies are affected by it, through and through. The hierarchy of awareness appears as somehow 'in between' our reflexive levels of experience, and that is what Ven. Ñāṇavīra meant by saying that they are perpendicular (see footnote 2). As a result of the presence of ignorance, this 'owner' which we mentioned above also appears like something which is *somewhere within* our experience, 'neither here nor there'. This elusiveness is maintained by the lack of one's capability of an indirect approach,[8] and as a result this 'owner' becomes identified with reflexive or immediate or reflexive-and-immediate or non-reflexive-nor-immediate aspects of life. In structural terms, simply not seeing this 'towards' of the hierarchy of awareness, makes the experience distorted, and following it means that one is going 'with the grain'—*anuloma*. Only, when 'towards' is *indirectly* seen as being *directly* dependent upon things which are impermanent, then the hierarchy of awareness will lose its 'pressure' and remain standing there, "cut off at the root, like a palm stump." (MN 72 / i, 487) At this point the actual hierarchy is *paṭiloma*, 'against the grain', i.e. 'towards' is seen as impermanent and because of that it ceases to be the *reason of one's actions*, i.e. Self is destroyed.

Thus, Self is the reason for the existence of Self, i.e. both reflexion and immediacy are equally affected by it. Only when reflexion-and-immediacy are seen as a whole as being determined by something else, the nature of the Self becomes revealed, which is that it is *not-Self* (neither owner nor master). Thus, that *thing* which was regarded as Self, does not disappear upon realization of *anicca* and *dukkha*, it 'changes direction', so to speak, and becomes not-Self, *anattā*. However, even then, the

thing remains there and what disappears is Self-view,[9] and that is because the hierarchy of awareness has lost its 'pressure';[10] thus certain assumptions in regard to reflexive hierarchy disappear.

1. For more on this subject see CtP, L. 93, pp. 351f. It is not possible to clarify the point any further, simply because of the nature of the subject. When one reflects, in a strict sense (i.e. reflexion), one is *aware*. What is then present in one's experience is hierarchy of awareness *together* with those things that were reflected upon, i.e. revealed by reflexion.↩

2. *NoD*, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE , Static Aspect, §16.↩

3. *Yena yena hi maññanti, tato taṃ hoti aññathā*, "In whatever terms they conceive it, it turns into something other than that." (Sn 3.12)↩

4. This is achieved in the practice of *jhāna*, which, however, will not concern us here.↩

5. *NoD*, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE , Static Aspect, §16.↩

6. "It is in the nature of the *pañc'upādānakkhandhā* to press for recognition, in one way or another, as 'self'." (*NoD*, PARAMATTHA SACCA , §6)↩

7. One does not see that the 'owner' depends upon his ownership.↩

8. By an 'indirect approach' we imply seeing the nature of superimposition. As it was outlined above, the *direct*

approach has been taken in this essay as *linear*, and as such it is incapable of reaching and understanding the hierarchy of awareness in a proper way (see the fifth paragraph). The *indirect approach* refers to seeing that with the presence of *what*, does *this* arise, and with the absence of *what*, does this cease. In other words, this is a phenomenological approach, or an approach founded upon *sati*, whereby the immediate things of experience are *not directly* followed at its initial appearance.↩

9. View originating from the Self.↩

10. Only an *arahat* is completely free from this pressing nature of experience. The case with other *sekhā* is that 'pressure' varies in degrees.↩

Papañca-Saññā-Sankhā

This compound has represented, to paraphrase John D. Ireland from his Udāna translation notes, a stumbling block which even the ancient commentaries find difficult to define. If the importance of the term is to be deduced from the extent of its difficulty then indeed understanding of this compound carries a lot of significance in regard to grasping of the Buddha's Teaching.

There are various translations of *papañca-saññā-sankhā,* with currently the most prominent ones being either Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's "notions [born of] mental proliferations" translating the term *papañca* as 'proliferation'; or Ven. Ñāṇamoli Thera's "calculations of perceptions of diversifications" where he renders papañca as 'diversification'. Beyond these two, plus the PTS Dictionary definition, I am not familiar in detail with any other different interpretations of this compound. I am aware that Ven. Ñāṇananda in his "Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought" addresses this topic to a certain degree and also that Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi based his views of the term upon this interpretation[1] but I, myself, have never actually read Ven. Ñāṇananda's book so my view on this matter will come from perhaps, to some extent, a different angle.

To start with, the respective terms 'diversification' and 'proliferation' do not deviate from the meaning of *papañca*. According to the PTS dictionary, *papañca* is "expansion, diffuseness, manifoldedness" or "obstacle, hindrance or delay". The other members of the compound are defined as *saññā* (perception) and *sankhā* (sign or characteristic). So the above-

mentioned translations would, to some degree, convey the nature of *papañca-saññā-sankhā* quite accurately and, as Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi says in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*[2] (endnote no. 229, p. 1204-5), “no rendering [of this compound] is utterly beyond doubt”. The question which raises itself then is not how to etymologically trace the exact roots and origination of the compound, since such, a task in this case proves impossible in the absolute sense (and many seem to agree with this). Rather, it is better to focus and try to find out *within* one’s own experience and practice what is implied existentially and phenomenologically in the Suttas by this term.

At the risk of being incomprehensible on some points, I would try to use ‘descriptive’ language, rather than overly technical terms as people’s general views are already quite firm in regard to such terminology and it is very likely that they will be coming from a quite different place than me, probably *too* different which could obstruct them from understanding what I’m trying to say. In order to reduce this possibility to a minimum I thought of using some more common terms in my descriptions which carry less chance of being misunderstood. I hope I won’t miss the mark too much.

Those familiar with phenomenology and the philosophy of existence should not have any problems in understanding a statement like all our experience is intentional or teleological or simply—significant. Each thing (*dhamma*) which is being experienced in our everyday life has, as its *inherent nature*, to point to other thing(s), within the experience as a whole. The thing’s significance is not something ‘steady’ or ‘inchangeable’, although it often might appear so. The significance of a thing is, rather, something which is being *acquired* through the

repetition of the respective experiences of that very thing. During this, the whole perception of a thing comes to 'grow' in a course of time, so to speak, and though there are certainly significances which are *recognized* as common to all people, at a more fundamental level they are all *individually* acquired and carried by each of us[3].

Without going into greater details let us say that in the Suttas this intentionality of experience is what is meant by the statement "with the grain" or *anuloma*. Actually, it is probably better to be more precise and to re-qualify this and say: taking for granted this intentionality, holding it and appropriating it, makes this *with* of "with the grain" to appear. In the *arahant*'s case, the ignorance is completely destroyed, yet the grain still remains, i.e. things *do not* stop pointing to other things, but this 'with' ceases to exist and is being replaced by 'against' as a result of which we get "against the grain"—*patiloma*. What has changed is the fundamental *direction* of regarding this very *directionality of experience*. Thus, even in the case of complete liberation things continue to be teleological or 'with purpose' so they still point to other things and so on. All this is being mentioned for the reason that the term *papañca* is probably too often misunderstood to simply mean 'mental proliferation', 'when one thinks or analyzes too much' or something like that. Although these things do imply *papañca* (or to be more precise ignorance and desire-and-lust), the above said nevertheless shows us that if *papañca* is anything, it is certainly more fundamental than that. In support of this we may add that *papañca* is frequently linked with *maññanā*, 'conceving' (for which see Mūlapariyāya Sutta, MN 1) which certainly represents the most fundamental 'occurrence' in a mind affected with ignorance. Thus, what *papañca* would imply is

nothing less than this very *intentionality* of our experience and its *tendency* to grow and expand. However this can happen only when that 'with' is present i.e. when the mind is not free from the bonds of ignorance and when it keeps following things in their appearance— "…his consciousness flows after the sign of form [sound, smell, tastes, touches, thoughts], is tied and shackled by gratification in the sign of form, if fettered by the fetter of gratification…"[4]. And surely enough it is said that the *arahant* is *nippapañca*—without diversifications, free from any attachments (*upadhi*), free from burden *accumulated* in the past.

Thus, one's world (everything which appears—*nāma-rūpa*), expands. One's views, desires etc. expand too, yet this should not be understood in a momentary sense, which would suggest that they will somehow 'shrink' afterwards[5] by themselves. Their *intensity* or the *intensity of their presence*, once 'accumulated' i.e. came to being, is being 'assumed' or 'held' (*upādāna*) at that (new) face value. When this happens—and it happens through the repetition of [ignorant] actions as said above—consciousness "becomes established" upon that *degree of presence*, which then becomes the *actual experience* of that *thing*. Thus, the intensity of experience, that which appears as *nāma-rūpa* grows (for more details see Mahānidāna Sutta, DN 15 [ii,63]). This kind of pattern stretches from the most fundamental levels of our existence (as seen in Mūlapariyāya Sutta), up to the coarsest ones which we might say are, "resorting to rods and weapons, of quarrels, brawls, disputes, recrimination, malicious words and false speech[6]…", that is *the directly painful actions resulting from one's ignorance*. Thus, based on the above, *papañca* represents the 'diffusion' of this fundamental underlying principle with ignorance being

necessarily present, and consequently *papañca-saññā-sankhā* are all ‘calculations’ or ‘notions’, perceived and originated as a result of taking this principle of diffusion for granted i.e. not understanding it.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that this whole situation would be much clearer if we can bear in mind Ven. Ñāṇavīra Thera’s description of the infinite hierarchy of consciousness, the different levels of generality of *nāma-rūpa—viññāṇa*. That is because *papañca-saññā-sankhā* is not something which appears on a voluntary level, as if one could stop it at any time; it stretches from the most general (reflexive) levels of existence[7]. What one is responsible for, in that whole structure, is “delighting in, welcoming and holding to…” the “source through which perceptions and notions [born of] mental proliferation beset a man…”[8]. Thus the hierarchy of signifying things continues to arise (cease and change-while-standing) but it no longer grows; it is “cut off at the root, made like a palm stump”. Its root was ignorance in itself and with its absence everything founded upon it comes to an end—one is free. In other words the respective experiences of the *puthujjana* and *arahant* alike, share the same fundamental nature of impermanence (arising and ceasing) but the respective *intensities* of those experiences are changed; for the *arahant feeling none* of it)[9] and for the *puthujjana* dependant on the amount of ignorance being present. More ignorance, more ‘intensity’, things appear as more ‘pressing’ and one is easily prone to giving in to desire-and-lust. The arising of things in the *puthujjana*’s mind brings diffusion of perceptions and notions which, while not understood at its roots, will in return diffuse further and further and so on. This cannot happen in the *arahant*’s mind any more. His consciousness has ‘ceased’ so there is nothing to

follow and diversify upon this teleological characteristic of the existential structure, which will remain only until his aggregates ‘break apart’.

1. Which, as I will attempt to show in this essay, is over-simplified.↩

2. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Third edition 2005.↩

3. Preferences and values being perhaps too coarse yet a good enough example of this.↩

4. Uddhesavibhanga Sutta, MN 138. [iii,225]↩

5. They would only do so in the arahant’s case.↩

6. Madhupiṇḍika Sutta, MN 18; translation taken from The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Third edition 2005, p. 202 [i,109].↩

7. Compare also the nature of the five hindrances. It takes the first jhāna for one to be able to suppress them, which speaks for itself, since such strength of one’s concentration is enough for becoming an arahant (if there is wisdom, of course).↩

8. op. cit. p. 202.↩

9. Compare Ven. Sāriputta’s answer to Ven. Udāyi when the later asked him what is there that is pleasant when there is

nothing felt [in nibbāna]—“Just this is pleasant, friend, that herein there is nothing felt”, AN iv,414.↩

The Infinity of The Mind (Notes on AN 1.51)

> *Pabhassaramidaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ. Tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham. Taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti. Tasmā 'assutavato puthujjanassa cittabhāvanā natthī'ti vadāmī"ti.*
>
> **"Bright, monks, is the mind. It is superimposed by the defiling obstructions. The uninstructed worldling does not know this. For the uninstructed worldling, therefore, there is no development of mind."**

Pabhassaram—this could be translated as 'bright', and it should be regarded as something lit up, shining, effulgent or *lucid*. To find out how this term should be understood, one can bring to mind the term *ākāsa*—space—which literally means 'shining forth', in the sense of a space which is lit up. In MN 49, we can see that consciousness is referred to as *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ*, where 'non-indicative', 'infinite' (or endless, limitless) and 'completely radiant' (i.e. utterly and fundamentally lucid, not to be understood in a sense of mystically beaming rays of light or similar), are the terms referring to *viññāṇa*.[1] The whole point is that 'brightness' is an epithet describing the inherently *infinite structure* of the mind, which is 'defiled' by the obstructions (i.e. made *finite*). In SN 35.202 the Buddha said:

> **How, friends, does one not leak? Here, friends, having seen form with eye, a monk does not incline towards pleasing forms, he is not affected by**

> **displeasing forms. He lives aware of the body there and with mind that is boundless.**

A monk can dwell and live his life with a “boundless mind”.[2] [3] He has understood the nature of the body *there* together with the arisen structure of the present experience,[4] which is infinite. By understanding the infinite or boundless, any boundaries and finiteness that were present as a result of that lack of understanding, are removed. In other words, the ‘brightness’ or ‘lucidity’ or ‘infinity’ or ‘boundlessness’ are the ways of describing the *property* of the fundamental structure of experience, which is the very reason why overcoming the obstructions is possible.

*Āgantuk*a—here it is translated as ‘superimposed’. It can also mean adventitious, incidental, accessory. The main point that has to be borne in mind is that the ‘obstructions’ are “incidental”, in the sense that they are not caused by the *pabhassaramidaṃ cittaṃ*, but are nevertheless there. The defiling obstructions do not have anything in common with the brightness of the mind; they are simply “layered” there, superimposed without actually affecting the infinite structure. Thus, since the infinite mind does not need those obstructions, it can be rightly said that they are completely gratuitous.[5]

So, obstructions, or more precisely *avijjā*, have no *first point* when they are manifested before which mind was pure, bright and unpolluted. Because of this it is not correct to refer to ‘bright mind’ as an *original thing*, as if it existed in a pure state *before* the obstructions arrived. Since there is no beginning to the infinity, nor to the beginningless *avijjā*, the notions of “first this, then that” have no place to apply. So how shall this evident

priority of the ‘bright mind’ be understood then? The answer is straight—in an atemporal, structural sense. The infinity of the mind precedes *avijjā* ontologically, so to speak, while they are there both, *simultaneously present.* This should also shed some light onto why the structure of the mind does not imply nor require the obstructions (hence they are called ‘obstructions’)—they are superfluous, unnecessary, superimposed. Yet, the *uppakilesā* are there, and are not to be found elsewhere.[6] To put this all in different words: the infinity of one’s mind is atemporally more fundamental than one’s own nescience in regard to it. Furthermore, it is because of the nescience in regard to the *nature of infinity*, that *avijjā* is *a beginningless phenomenon*. If infinity has no beginning, how could the fundamental ignorance of that be different?

This is not all, there are further implications of one’s ignorance of the infinite structure—namely, *permanence.* The uninstructed worldling confuses the notion of infinity (no beginning, no end) with the notion of *eternity*, or rather *identifies* the two. In this way, a present experience is regarded as eternal or permanent. What a *puthujjana* does not see is that eternity implies infinity, but the infinity does not imply eternity.[7] Because of the nescience in regard to this, the *puthujjana’s* experience of infinity *assumes* permanence. In other words, his *citta* is regarded as permanent; he regards his Self as permanent. If one would be able to see the infinity without eternity, or even to see it as impermanent, the notion of Self, and everything else that depended upon it, (which required the notion of permanence), would cease without a remainder. Knowing infinity as something present (i.e. arisen) but impermanent (for the very reason that it has *arisen* on its own accord), clears the mind of any obstructions, any superimposed interferences with

the infinite structure. Hence it is said that the *arahant's* mind is *immeasurable*.[8] His *citta* has been developed to the structurally more fundamental state, and it is because this state was always *possible* (but not *actual*)[9] that transcending the obstructions was feasible. In other words, if one's mind was *inherently* ignorant—i.e. *avijjā* structurally preceded any experience—arahantship would not be possible. (See footnote [5] above).[10]

1. Ñāṇavīra Thera took sabbatopabhaṃ to be sabbato-apahaṃ (from apahoti, a+pahoti), in which case this compound would be synonymous with anidassanaṃ, 'non-indicative' or 'not-producing'(Self). (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera—Clearing the Path (2010), 'Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda', footnote j, p.28). Whether he was right or wrong in reading it like this, it is clear here that either way the context is scarcely affected—the infinity of consciousness does not indicate Self, does not produce Self, and it is fundamentally lucid, radiant, and unobstructed.↩

2. Cf. MN 38.↩

3. This also indicates that the states of 'boundlessness', 'infinity' and similar that are mentioned in the Suttas are not exclusively reserved for "meditation attainments", as they are commonly regarded.↩

4. Cf. "There is just this body and name-and-form externally…"—SN 12.19.↩

5. "Craving, however, is a gratuitous (though beginningless) parasite on the intentional structure described here, and its necessity is not to be deduced from the necessity of

intention in all experience. Intention does not imply craving—a hard thing to understand! But if intention did imply craving, arahatta would be out of the question, and there would be no escape."—Ñāṇavīra Thera, op. cit., footnote f, p. 56.↩

6. Cf. MN 44.↩

7. The reader might notice that Ñāṇavīra Thera in 'Fundamental Structure' (op.cit. p. 107) refers to the endurance of a thing as 'eternal'. This structural 'eternity' is what is meant here by 'infinity'. It is just how one decides to designate these terms. If we were to choose the term 'eternal' to describe the property of the structure, we would additionally have to qualify it by saying: "A thing endures for ever. A thing is eternal… until it ceases." I, personally, prefer 'infinite' so that the distinction between the inherent nature of the arisen experience (infinity) becomes apparent from the puthujjana's appropriation of it (eternity).↩

8. Cf. AN 3.115 & SN 35.202.↩

9. Cf. nibbānadhātu↩

10. For these very reasons the Buddha was able to "rediscover" the path which lay there. For more cf. SN 12.65.↩

Not Perceiving the Feeling (Notes on MN 43)

> **Friend, feeling and perception and consciousness- these things are associated, not disassociated. It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference [between them]. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one cognizes. Therefore, these things are associated not disassociated. It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference[between them].**
>
> – MN 43

The Teaching is for the one who feels. When one thinks "this is what I feel", that is what one *thinks*, not what one *feels*. Feeling cannot be thought, it cannot be perceived. What one perceives is one's perception, what one feels is one's feeling.[1] Feeling and perception are simply *there*, superimposed, independent and different in nature.

"What one feels, that one perceives."

Thinking that it is *the same* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [same] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.

Thinking that it is *a different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that

[different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.

Thinking that it is *both-the-same-and-different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [both-the-same-and-different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.

Thinking that it is *neither-the-same-nor-different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [neither-the-same-nor-different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.

Thus, through that assumption, one *identifies* that thing.

Whether one thinks it is the same, or different, or both or neither, feeling is there, *regardless* of the perception in regard to it. Thus, a feeling cannot be thought, it can only be *felt*. A perception cannot be felt, it can only be *perceived*. One has to learn *how to feel*, or how to *know* 'that because of which' the feeling is.[2] This means how to *discern* it from that which perception is. This cannot be done by separating feeling and perception and examining them individually.[3] So how can one do it then?-

By *feeling* [the feeling]. By *perceiving* [the perception]. By *cognizing* [the cognizance].

By *cognizing feeling*-while-perceiving.

By *understanding* cognizing.

By *not-conceiving* perception.

If the superimposition of these two completely independent simultaneously present domains is understood, the assumption of *an independent thing*,[4] outside of feeling and perception ceases to be "a bridge" for the two. The 'thing' which is being *identified* (as the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different), is that "bridge" and feeling and perception 'meet' or 'come together' because of it. That thing is assumed *to be that* which one *feels* and *perceives*.[5] In this way, feeling and perception (and consciousness) also come to be *identified*.[6] Thus, that '[assumption of a] thing' which identifies the *unidentifiable* [7] feeling and perception makes them *manifest in* that *identity*-feeling and perception come to *exist*. The identity feels, the identity perceives-*I* feel, *I* perceive.

One feels pleasure, one feels pain, one feels neither-pain-nor-pleasure.

One perceives blue, one perceives yellow, one perceives red, one perceives white.[8]

One can be *aware* of what one feels; one can also be *aware* of what one perceives. *Through understanding that because of which one is aware of,* one *knows* the feeling and perception *structurally* cannot overlap or merge or "be bridged" or identified;[9] This makes the *assumption* in regard to feeling and perception (as the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different),[10] *redundant*, *irrelevant*, *not worth maintaining*. Why? Because it does not and it cannot make *any difference* to the *structural order* of things (feeling feels, perception perceives). If it could, the freedom from suffering would not be possible.[11] Fully understanding that whichever way one's thought (assumption) goes, the feeling

cannot be *identified* as (the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different from) perception, leaves that feeling and that perception just standing there-*indifferent* to each other.[12] [13]

Agreeable perception is assumed *to be that* which is pleasantly felt;

Disagreeable perception is assumed *to be that* which is unpleasantly felt;

Neutral perception is assumed *to be that* which is neutrally felt.

Thus, one thinks it is *this sight* [14](sounds, smells…thoughts) *that is felt*. Because of that feeling one sets upon to 'affect' those sights (sounds, smells, …thoughts), sets upon to change them, modify them, adjust them, pursue them, avoid them; one gets *entangled* in the sights (sounds, smells…thoughts) *on account of what* one feels *when they are* . Knowing that feeling is *just there*-being felt, and perception is *just there*-being perceived, makes further entanglement *impossible*, and any entanglement that was there[15] is made redundant, disowned, dropped down, never to picked up again. Why? Because it was structurally impossible to get entangled in the first place, but until one has fully understood that, one's 'not-knowing-that-one-cannot-be-entangled' *was one's entanglement.* When one understands that the arisen things cannot structurally *relate* to each other-feeling feels the feeling, perception perceives the perception[16] *–concern* becomes impossible or *inconceivable-dukkha* completely ceases, never to arise again.

1. Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Clearing the Path, SAÑÑĀ, §2.↩

2. Or how to not-conceive ‘that because of which’ perception is.↩

3. Thinking it in isolation from the present experience (i.e. from perception and consciousness) would amount to this. Since the separation cannot actually occur (not even in one’s imagination), all one can do is assume that which is different between those three.↩

4. The [sense of] independence is the inevitable outcome of the presence of the assumption in one’s experience. It is not therefore accidental that one’s sense of Self is always regarded as an extra-temporal and changeless, i.e. independent (from the rest of the experience). Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, op.cit., ATTĀ, §1 and L.147, §3.↩

5. Thus, because of this assumption, one feels the thing, not one’s feelings; one perceives the thing, not one’s perception. By doing so one conceives things different to what they are, and when those things change one suffers.↩

6. Cf. my essay Determining Determinations. ‘That because of which’ [feeling, perception, consciousness are] is assumed as ‘that which’ feeling, perception, consciousness ‘are’.↩

7. “It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference…”-MN 43.↩

8. Cf. MN 43.↩

9. Or cross into each other’s domains.↩

10. All of these are forms of identity.↩

11. Cf. my essay .↩

12. By understanding this structural ‘indifference’, one feels indifferent to the whole structure-which is what upekkhā is.↩

13. It is the nature of the superimposition that breeds this indifference, since concern is in its nature always in relation to something.↩

14. Disagreeable (or agreeable, or neutral)↩

15. In the past, or possible in the future, or standing there in the present.↩

16. Matter matters, feeling feels, perception perceives, determinations determine, consciousness cognizes.↩

Resistance and Designation (Notes on DN 15)

Nāmarūpapaccayā phasso'ti iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ, tadānanda, imināpetaṃ pariyāyena veditabbaṃ, yathā nāmarūpapaccayā phasso. Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi nāmakā-yassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu asati api nu kho rūpakāye adhivacanasamphasso paññāyethā ti?

No hetaṃ, bhante.

Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi rūpakāyassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho nāmakāye paṭighasamphasso paññāyethā ti?

No hetaṃ, bhante.

Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi nāmakāyassa ca rūpakāyassa ca paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho adhivacanasamphasso vā paṭighasamphasso vā paññāyethā ti?

No hetaṃ, bhante.

Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi nāma-rūpassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu

ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho phasso paññā-yethā ti?

No hetaṃ, bhante.

Tasmātihānanda, eseva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo phassassa, yadidaṃ nāmarūpaṃ.

"'With name-&-matter as condition, contact', so it was said: how it is, Ānanda, that with name-&-matter as condition there is contact should be seen in this manner. Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the name-body is described,—they being absent, would designation-contact be manifest in the matter-body?

-No indeed, lord.

-Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the matter-body is described,—they being absent, would resistance-contact be manifest in the name-body?

-No indeed, lord.

-Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the name-body and the matter-body are described,—they being absent, would either designation-contact or resistance-contact be manifest?

-No indeed, lord.

-Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which name-&-matter is described,—they being absent, would contact be manifest?

-No indeed, lord.

-Therefore, Ānanda, just this is the reason, this is the occasion, this is the arising, this is the condition of contact, that is to say name-&-matter."

1. ‘Matter’ is required for ‘name’ to be present. If there would not be that which is ‘named’, ‘name’ would not be able to arise. If on the other hand, ‘name’ is absent, ‘matter’ would simply be inconceivable. Thus, there is no ‘name’ without ‘matter’ and there is no ‘matter’ without ‘name’, hence-*name-&-matter*. In this way ‘name’ *designates* the resistance, and ‘matter’ *resists* the designation. Without ‘name'(-body), there would not be any designation manifested in ’matter'(-body), but without ’matter'(-body), there would not be any resistance manifested in the ’name'(-body). It is these respective *manifestations* of ’designation’ and ‘resistance’ that are *puthujjana’s* problem.

2. With name-&-matter, he *assumes* that it is *this* ‘matter’ that is *designated.* Through that *assumption,* designation *manifests* in that matter body[1]. In this way one’s ‘matter’ is *designated*-one is *contacted*.

With name-&-matter, he *assumes* that it is *this* ‘name’ that is *resisted.* Through that *assumption,* resistance *manifests* in that name-body. In this way one’s ‘name’ is *resisted*-one is *contacted*.

He assumes that it is *this* ‘matter’ that is designated.

He assumes it is the *same* 'matter' that is designated and is the condition for 'name'; he assumes it is a *different* 'matter' that is designated and is the condition for 'name'; He assumes it is *both-same-&-different* matter that is designated and is the condition for 'name'; He assumes it is *neither-same-nor-different* 'matter' that is designated and is the condition for 'name'. Either way-the assumption is *there.*

That which resists him he designates as the same, different, both-same-&-different, or neither same-nor-different, as that because of which 'name' is there. The designation *manifests* in this 'matter'.[2]

Thus, he designates (*contacts*) his resistance. Contact is there.

He assumes that it is *this* 'name' that is resisted.

He assumes it is the *same* 'name' that is resisted and is the condition for 'matter'; He assumes it is a *different* 'name' that is resisted and is the condition for 'matter'; He assumes it is *both-same-&-different* 'name' that is resisted and is the condition for 'matter'; He assumes it is *neither-same-nor-different* 'name' that is resisted and is the condition for 'matter'; Either way-the assumption is *there.*

That which is designated he resists as the same, different, both-same-&-different, or neither same-nor-different, as that because of which 'matter' is there. The resistance *manifests* in this 'name'.[3]

> **Thus, he resists (*contacts*) his designation. Contact is there.**

3. *Cf. Mūḷapariyāya Sutta*, MN 1:

> *Pathaviṃ pathavito sañjānāti; pathaviṃ pathavito saññatvā pathaviṃ maññati, pathaviyā maññati, pathavito maññati, pathaviṃ meti maññati, pathaviṃ abhinandati. taṃ kissa hetu? `apariññātaṃ tassā'ti vadāmi.*
>
> **"From earth, he has a percept of earth; having had from earth a percept, he conceives [that to be] earth, he conceives [that to be] in earth, he conceives [that to be] out of earth, he conceives earth as 'mine', he delights earth. Why is that? He has not fully understood it, I say..."**

What a *puthujjana* has to realise is that regardless of *what* he perceives, it is always his *perception* that is perceived. Whether it is 'earth', 'water', 'fire', 'air' or any other thing that MN 1 mentions, all one will ever perceive (*puthujjana* and *arahant* alike) is one's own perception of that 'matter'.[4] This is saying nothing else than 'matter' is and will *always be outside* of one's reach, outside of that which has appeared.[5] Perception is that which is perceived, but perception would not be possible if there is no matter to be perceived; on the other hand matter would be *inconceivable* if perception was indiscernible. If one thinks "it is because of the matter, that perception is there", *that* thought is *perceived*, which means that *that* which is 'matter' *in that thought* is also perceived. But since it is only perception that can be perceived, that 'matter' which is perceived in that thought, cannot be that 'matter' which cannot be perceived,

since it is perceived. In this way, *from* 'matter', a *puthujjana* has a percept of 'matter', which he *conceives* to be that *same* 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *different* 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *both-same &-different* 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *neither-same-nor-different* 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter. Either way 'matter' is *conceived.* He becomes responsible for the *manifestation* of the conceiving of that 'matter', he "makes" that 'matter' *exist*.[6] That "creation" is *his*-thus it is '*my*' 'matter'.[7] But, since that 'my matter' is conceived as that 'matter' *because of which* there is a percept of matter, then that percept[ion] too becomes *'my perception'*.[8] The same goes for one's feelings and intentions. They are all conceived as *mine*. Since the *puthujjana's* whole experience is *his*, he thinks he *himself is*-the view of Self exists.[9]

4. When consciousness does not indicate any 'me' or 'mine', that 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter, does not manifest itself in that perception (or feeling, or intention)-it does not manifest itself in 'name'. Thus, in perception there is only perception, i.e. in the seen there is only that which is seen, namely-the seen (and so on for all the senses).[10] One ceases to "perceive 'matter'"; one *knows*[11] such a thing is impossible or *inconceivable*,[12] one simply *understands*[13]: *there is* matter, *there is* perception (or feeling, or intention), *there is* (non-indicative) consciousness. One *understands*-there are five "heaps".[14] Since one understands them, one ceases to *assume* them. With the cessation of assumption, *that* which they were *assumed to be*, ceases-*bhava* comes to an end.

1. Upādānapaccayā bhavo.↩

2. ‘Name’ assumes existence in ‘matter’-‘name’ exists.↩

3. ‘Matter’ finds footing in ‘name’-‘matter’ exists.Cf. DN 11.↩

4. “It would be as wrong to say ‘a feeling is perceived’ as it would ‘a percept is felt’ (which mix up saññā and vedanā); but it is quite in order to say ‘a feeling, a percept, (that is, a felt thing, a perceived thing) is cognized’, which simply means that a feeling or a percept is present (as, indeed, they both are in all experience—see Majjhima v,3 (M.i,293)). Strictly speaking, then, what is cognized is nāmarūpa, whereas what is perceived (or felt) is saññā (or vedanā), i.e. only nāma. This distinction can be shown grammatically. Vijānāti, to cognize, is active voice in sense (taking an objective accusative): consciousness cognizes a phenomenon (nāmarūpa); consciousness is always consciousness of something. Sañjānāti, to perceive, (or vediyati, to feel) is middle voice in sense (taking a cognate accusative): perception perceives [a percept] (or feeling feels [a feeling]). Thus we should say ‘a blue thing (= a blueness), a painful thing (= a pain), is cognized’, but ‘blue is perceived’ and ‘pain is felt’. (In the Suttas generally, due allowance is to be made for the elasticity in the common usage of words. But in certain passages, and also in one’s finer thinking, stricter definition may be required.)”-Ñāṇavīra Thera, Clearing the Path, 2010, p. 92.↩

5. Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Seeking The Path, 2010, p. 40, §§17-18: “[Four mahābhutā]…will always be just below our feet.”↩

6. Thus, ‘matter’ can never be perceived, but it can “find footing” in that which is perceived (or felt, or intended).↩

7. He delights in his own creation, because it is his own creation.↩

8. If one is not to conceive that ‘matter’ because of which there is a percept of matter, one would not conceive oneself as that because of which there is a perceiver and conceiver of the world. Cf. SN 35.116: The eye… ear… nose… tongue… body… mind… is that in the world by which one is a perceiver and conceiver of the world. Also, cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, op.cit. p. 298: And when shall we ‘not be that by which’? … the Buddha tells us: it is when, for us, in the seen there shall be just the seen, and so with the heard, the sensed, and the cognized. And when in the seen is there just the seen? When the seen is no longer seen as ‘mine’ (etaṃ mama) or as ‘I’ (eso’ham asmi) or as ‘my self’ (eso me attā): in brief, when there is no longer, in connexion with the senses, the conceit ‘I am’, by which ‘I am a conceiver of the world’.↩

9. That’s how the sense of the ‘mine’ leads to the sense of ‘Self’.↩

10. Cf. Bāhiya Sutta, Ud. 10/8.↩

11. “Wisdom is to be developed…”-MN 43.↩

12. If it were fundamentally subject to one’s conceivings, freedom from conceivings would not be possible. Cf. my .↩

13. “…consciousness is to be understood”.-MN 43.↩

14. Simultaneous, superimposed, utterly indifferent to each other.↩

Determining Determinations

1. Feeling, perception and consciousness are always there together.[1] It is impossible to have them arising independently and on their own; when there is one, the other two are present as well. They do not pass into each other's domain[2]: one feels one's feeling, one perceives one's perception, one cognizes one's cognizance. Assuming that it is the same thing that one feels, perceives and cognizes, or assuming that it is a different thing that one feels, perceives, and cognizes, or both-the-same-&-different thing that one feels, perceives, and cognizes, or neither-the-same-nor-different thing that one feels, perceives, and cognizes, means that *assumed thing* is *there*-it *exists*. One *conceives it* through one's feeling, one's perception, and one's cognizance. One conceives that thing because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, *as that thing* because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there. But since all one can ever feel is one's feeling; all one can ever perceive is one's perception; all one can ever cognize is one's cognizance-*that thing* which is conceived *as that because of* which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, will *have to be* either *a feeling, a perception* or *a cognizance*, and as such *cannot be that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there.[3] By conceiving a feeling, or a perception, or a cognizance *as that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there, one *assumes* that feeling, or perception, or cognizance, *existing independently* of feeling, perception and cognizance, *as that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there. Thus, *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance *are* there, *manifests in that* feeling, perception or cognizance

which are *assumed to be that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there. Thus, *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance *are* there, manifests in that being-it *exists*.

2. That because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, is that which is *a necessary condition* for feeling, perception and cognizance that are there, because *without it*, that feeling, perception and cognizance would *not be there*. As a necessary condition, that because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, is thus *that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined.* But since through the assumption, *that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined*, *manifests as* feeling, perception, or cognizance *because of which* that feeling, perception and cognizance are there, *that* feeling, perception and cognizance *are determined as that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance *are determined*.[4] Thus, through *not knowing* that one can only feel one's feelings, perceive one's perception, cognize one's cognizance,[5] one *determines that by which* one's feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined, as* a feeling, a perception or a cognizance. Through that lack of knowledge, determinations are manifested-*avijjāpaccayā saṅkārā.*

3. One determines one's determinations through assuming that because of which determinations are there.

But that because of which determinations are there cannot be that which is determined by those determinations, since all one can determine are one's determination, not *that because of which* those determinations are there. Since determinations cannot determine that because of which determinations are

there, that because of which determinations are there is that which is non-determinable-it is *undetermined*. If that because of which the determinations are there was *to be* determined, then the escape from determinations would not be possible.[6]

One can know that that because of which determinations are there cannot be determined.

Without knowing *that knowing*, one's knowledge of that because of which determinations are there, *determines* that because of which determinations are there, *as that* because of which determinations are there.[7]

Since that because of which determinations are there *cannot fundamentally be determined,* one's knowledge that *determines* that because of which determinations are there, *leads to* 'assuming' *that* because of which determinations are there *as that* because of which determinations are there.

And since that assumption is then *there*, *that* which is determined as *that because of which* determinations are there, is *there too*, *as that assumed determination* because of which determinations are there-it is *manifested*, it *exists*.

One can know that that because of which determinations are there cannot be determined.

By knowing *that knowing*,[8] one's knowledge of that because of which determinations are there, *does not determine* that because of which determinations are there,[9] *as that* because of which determinations are there.

Since that because of which determinations are there *cannot fundamentally be determined,*[10] one's knowledge that *does not determine* that because of which determinations are there *does not lead to* 'assuming' *that* because of which determinations are there *as that* because of which determinations are there.

And since that assumption is then *not there,* that which is determined as that because of which determinations are there, is *not there either*, *as that assumed determination* because of which determinations are there-it is *not manifested,* it *does not exist.*[11] [12] [13]

1. Cf. MN 43.↩

2. Cf. .↩

3. Now is probably the time to mention that none of this, nor paragraphs to follow, can be grasped intellectually by the reader. Things that are described here are not to be made sense of in a rationally or philosophically satisfying way, but to be seen in a certain order that they arise in one's experience. Hence the deliberate repetitive style which aligns things in the order they are to be understood (which is also the reason why the Suttas are in that form). Also, refraining from a too particular and established terminology was intentional, since that would most likely lead a reader to assume that he already knows what those terms refer to.↩

4. Cf. Khanda Saṃyutta viii,7.↩

5. And not that because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there.↩

6. “There is, monks, (a) non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined. If, monks, there were not that non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined, an escape from (the) born, become, made, determined would not be discernible. But, because there is (a) non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined escape from (the) born, become, made, determined is discernible.”—Nibbāna Sutta, Ud. 8/3. the structure of the experience fundamentally be appropriated, freedom from the appropriation is possible.↩

7. “From nibbāna, he has a percept of nibbāna; having known nibbāna from nibbāna, he conceives nibbāna, he conceives in nibbāna, he conceives out of nibbāna, he conceives ‘My’ nibbāna, he delights nibbāna. Why is that? He has not fully understood it, I say.”—MN 1. Also cf. MN 102, [237].↩

8. One knows that whether one intends toward, away, both or neither, in regard to that because of which intentions are there, that because of which intentions are there remains there, regardless of the intention in regard to it. By understanding that it is fundamentally inaccessible to one’s intentions, one ceases to crave towards it with those intentions, one ceases to assume it through those intentions, since neither intentions nor that which directly stands upon them, namely-one’s assumption-could access it. And one knows that. [‘Ignorant intentions’ are simply craving, which leads to ‘assumption’-taṇhapaccayā upādāna. Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, op.cit., p.56, footnote f.:

“Intention does not imply craving-a hard thing to understand!”]).↩

9. Does not “stand for it” in one’s experience, does not “represent it”, does not “manifest it”.↩

10. Cannot be ‘accessed’ by it.↩

11. The assumption is made redundant.↩

12. If one thinks “there is that because of which intentions are there, which is inaccessible to those intentions”, that thought ‘stands for’ that because of which intentions are there, and through that thought one assumes access to that inaccessible-inaccessible exists. If one knows that regardless of what a thought or intention stand for, it can never “step outside” of its nature-one can only think one’s thoughts (perception perceived) or intend one’s intentions, not that because of which that thought/intention are there-one ceases to assume that which that intention stands for, because of which intention is there. Thus, intention remains, while “attempts to access” fade away, since one sees them as pointless and loses interest in them. When those “attempts” are thoroughly subdued, ‘the assumption’ of that which was assumed “accessible” (through those very attempts) disappears too, never to return.↩

13. The only reason why assumption can be made redundant, is because it was redundant in the first place. Not knowing that it was redundant, makes it necessary, until it ceases to be so. And the reason why assumption presents itself as necessary is because it assumes that which is necessary in one’s experience, namely-the five aggregates. Thus, the five

aggregates, which are necessary in one's experience, come to exist, through the assuming of them as that which is necessary in one's experience. But since they are necessary in one's experience, assuming them as necessary in one's experience is not necessary. But until one knows that, that assumption will exist.↩

Notes on Meditation

1. Mindfulness of breathing, bhikkhus, developed and repeatedly practised, is of great fruit, of great benefit; mindfulness of breathing, bhikkhus, developed and repeatedly practised, perfects the four foundations of mindfulness; the four foundations of mindfulness, developed and repeatedly practised, perfect the seven enlightenment factors; the seven enlightenment factors, developed and repeatedly practised, perfect knowledge and freedom…

2. Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.

3. Breathing in long, he knows, 'I breathe in long'; or breathing out long, he knows, 'I breathe out long.'

4. Breathing in short, he knows, 'I breathe in short'; or breathing out short, he knows, 'I breathe out short.'

5. 'Experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe in,' he trains himself thus; 'experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe out,' he trains himself thus.

6. 'Calming the bodily determination, I shall breathe in,' he trains himself thus; 'calming the bodily

> **determination, I shall breathe out,' he trains himself thus…**
>
> – Ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118)

1. The practice of ānāpānasati or mindfulness of breathing represents a phenomenological exercise in developing the principle of simultaneity (akālikā dhamma). This is accomplished by the sufficient establishing of mindfulness and knowledge of what one is supposed to do and discern.[1] It is an exercise because it requires one actively engaging in and being aware of the act of breathing, and it develops the principle of simultaneity because while one is actively breathing, one is aware of one's actions (body, feelings, and thoughts). These are two different, simultaneously present things: the physical or bodily act of breathing, and the mental reflexive thoughts of one doing that very act. One is not supposed to be favoured on account of the other; a person should not be overdoing the breathing (i.e. turning it into a forceful breathing exercise) nor should he be underdoing it (i.e. forgetting about the act of breathing that is being performed, and letting it happen unawares). In the same sense one should not overthink one's thinking (i.e. get lost in thought). The point is to mindfully breathe while remaining fully aware of oneself-mindfully-breathing, or – to put it simply – to remain aware of the present phenomenon of "I am breathing."

2. Breathing is an intentional action, not a habit, and there is volition involved in every single breath a person takes. The reason why most people think breathing is an automated process is because they are almost never aware of it. Thus the intentional side of the breath remains obscured.[2] By being an

act (kamma), it has potential, if understood as such, to reveal the nature of all acts (present, future and past), of everything one has ever intentionally done and planning to do. By being an intentional act, breathing shares the same universal nature as all good and evil actions in this world. The reason why breathing is such a suitable act for the practice of mindfulness[3] is because it is an immediately neutral action, there is no actual good or bad involved in it. Thus, although it shares the same nature as all these other more "kammically" (and consequentially) engaging acts, there are no future results involved that would pertain to oneself and others. The merit of an in-breath ceases with an out-breath.

3. As we see from the opening excerpt, by "training oneself thus…," a monk develops mindfulness of both immediate and possible action (kamma): "I breathe in/out (thus)…," and "(thus) I shall breathe in/out…." This kind of mindfulness when developed leaves nothing out, and one is simply, yet steadily, becoming more aware of the nature of action in general while that very action is actually present. Ultimately of course, this leads to the full transparency of that "I", in that experience of breathing as a whole, and it's utterly redundant nature that is being gratuitously assumed.[4] This nature, if mindfulness pursued to the extent necessary,[5] can eventually be completely understood and the gratuitous "I" destroyed. This, however, should not be taken in a sense that the phenomenon of "I" would disappear like it was never there, but in a sense that that "I" will cease to be "me" and "mine". It will remain just standing there, hollow and dry.

4. The reason why it is recommended that one should sit when exercising mindfulness of breathing is because such a posture

offers the least distractions to one's mind. When seated, one will not be engaging in any other action different from breathing (and passively sitting of course). So, the only thing that one is going to be doing is breathing. In this way it can be understood that sitting is the most optimal posture to have, so that one wouldn't be wasting any effort. Consequently, with the further development of the discernment of the simultaneously present phenomena, and with the strengthening of mindfulness, one can more freely assume other postures and not remain confined to sitting alone. Furthermore, even engaging in other acts, for example: "while breathing, I am sweeping the floor," will not be a distraction for one's mindfulness in any way. In this particular instance, one's mindfulness and discernment is divided, or shared by, two simultaneously present actions (sweeping and breathing), while one is also simultaneously aware of that thing as a whole. And this division can continue as far as the strength of one's mindfulness allows, though there is no particular benefit and reason in pushing it.

5. Sometimes people assume that in ānāpānasati one is mindful of the "body of breath," as opposed to just one's (experience of) body.[6] This rendering comes from the confusion and lack of phenomenological insight into the nature of the (appearing) body. If one is to understand that whether it is the ordinary experience of one's body in everyday existence, or an unusual one resulting from the new practice of concentration, or even a strange sense of lightness of one's body on drugs, in phenomenological terms – body is just there. Thus, again, regardless of the particular way one's body presents itself, it is the phenomenon of the body that is present, and that's what one should be concerned with. So, when practising mindfulness of breathing, one actually devotes direct attention to the 'act of

breathing,' that body (or that strange-sense-of-body) that emerges as a phenomenon, peripherally, is that which is the body, in that experience right then and there. In this way one experiences one's body through an act of breathing, which is why the Buddha said that body, as one of the foundations of mindfulness, is brought to fulfillment in the practice of ānāpānasati.[7]

By being able to see peripherally that which appears as peripheral, but simultaneously present, one does not conceive it. It is the intention in regard to the peripheral,[8] which tends to make things actual[9] that carries appropriation. If one succeeds in leaving it peripheral (i.e. the way it has arisen), one is practicing mindfulness correctly. The tendency towards 'conceivings' will slowly fade when the mindfulness reaches the necessary extent. Again, knowledge of what the conceiving is (i.e. not understanding the phenomenon of simultaneously and dependently present and leaving it as such), is an absolute requirement, because without it this whole practice won't bear fruits of any fundamental importance. However, even a puthujjana, by trying to understand what the correct practice of mindfulness is, might actually understand it, and then cease to be a puthujjana, so this whole practice should be encouraged regardless.[10]

6. The contemporary Buddhist outlook usually equates the practice of ānāpānasati with the practice of jhānas, and if not regarded as the same, it is too often thought that by practicing ānāpānasati one will by default "enter" a jhāna. I suspect this assumption stems from the commentarial times, whereby various meditation techniques, that revolve around the idea of the mindfulness of breathing, were concocted and advertised as

something that would directly lead to the experience of jhānas.[11]

Jhānas are the establishments of mind, and as such they are to be developed upon the sufficient degree of mindfulness, which in return can be established upon various different things, ānāpānasati being one of them.[12] Thus, it should be clear, that the practice of jhāna is a fundamentally different practice from ānāpānasati. While ānāpānasati shares a nature of the phenomenological exercise of one's actions in regard to body, feelings, mind and thoughts, jhāna is less of that, but more of an establishment of one's mind upon a certain way of attending to things (in this case upon a phenomenological surmounting of the sensual domain), and the discernment involved therein. In other words, by understanding what jhāna is, one enters it,[13] not by performing a set of prescribed motions that somehow make it "happen" to one.

Obviously, one can develop and establish an unwavering mindfulness through the practice of ānāpānasati, and once established one could change one's outlook and with such mindfulness recognize the extent of sensuality, as a phenomenon, and what exactly it entails, and by doing so step outside of it, so to speak. In this way one would enter the first jhāna, where that mindfulness would remain fully established and can be developed even further.[14] It is clear here that it is not that ānāpānasati in itself took one automatically into a jhāna, but that the change of attending to things did,[15] once the mindfulness was strong enough. Furthermore, jhāna is not taught as a goal in itself, as Kāyagatāsati Sutta (MN 119) tells us, but as one of the forms that can bring one's mindfulness to the necessary fulfillment.

So, in order for any of these paragraphs to be intelligible, one will have to abandon the notions of “meditation techniques' and all the contemporary ideas of the practice of concentration, which is usually taught at the expense of mindfulness and with underlying wrong views (such as mystical absorptions and novelty experiences that then become a measure of one’s”success“). When a person hears the term ānāpānasati, he will be better o thinking”development of mindfulness" – the same mindfulness that he has to varying extents in his day-to-day experiences.

7. “Meditation techniques” are usually sets of fairly random motions and performances, idiosyncratic to the particular meditation teacher, that require one to fol ow certain prescribed steps which if performed correctly, and with some luck, will make one experience “something”. Often, in return, that same teacher would have to “interpret” back these experiences for one.

To put it bluntly: if one needs to be told by another what the significance of one’s experience was, this means one has not understood it by oneself. It means one is still concerned with the particular aspects (i.e. the random contents) of one’s meditation experience, and one fails to see the general nature of it all. As a result, any external interpretation is regarded as an explanation, which means that phenomenology remains buried deep down under layers of preconceived ideas and assumptions. This holds true even more when it comes to the idea of “attainments”, which are also regarded as experiences that “happen” to one, almost against one’s will and as a result of “a very good technique” one has employed. There is a concealed irony there that escapes such people, because if one needs to be

“confirmed” a sotāpanna, for example, by one’s teacher, this means one doesn’t know that one actually is a sotāpanna, which means that one can still doubt it, which in return means that one is not freed from the fetter of doubt, i.e. actually not a sotāpanna. The irony is further amplified if the teacher goes ahead and “confirms' one. If one is to actually understand what”being free from doubt" (and the other two fetters, characteristic of the sotāpanna) is, one would realize how non-applicable any external affirmation or denial is.[16]

How obstructive to phenomenology (i.e. mindfulness) this whole way of practising is, can be seen from the nature of understanding. One understands things when one understands them, when the knowledge in regard to the nature of an arisen thing is there, and not when one successfully goes through a set of methods and observances that relies on an almost mechanical set of motions one has to perform attentively. Any bodily act and any act that pertains to the bodily domain (such as the celebrated and misguided notion of “sensations”[17] which involve observing different parts and aspects of one’s body) is simply irrelevant for the discerning of the nature of an arisen phenomenon.[18] It is misleading and obstructive, because it is impossible to engage in a technique without the implicit belief that a set of motions, that the chosen technique consists of, performed in a particular mechanical order, will somehow, by itself, reveal the nature of things. By holding this belief and faith in a technique, one will not be trying to understand things, and by not making attempts toward the understanding, one will definitely remain devoid of it.

One sees things correctly – as phenomena – by understanding what the phenomenon is, and there is no technique that can

make this magically occur. Thus, the closest to what one should do in order to obtain understanding is: trying to understand. For as long as a person is attempting to understand and see the nature of an arisen thing, that person might actually succeed in it, for it is certain that understanding cannot occur in someone who is not trying to understand. Incidentally (or not), there is never any mention of meditation techniques in the Suttas, but 'understanding' and 'discernment', as a way to reach the final freedom from suffering, is described and referred to countless times.

When one looks at the experience mindfully, it becomes apparent that regardless of the content of the particular experience, the nature of experience is present. So, whether it is the experience of "impatiently-waiting-for-a-bus," or the experience of tiredness after a physical exertion, or strange and novel experience of a powerful light that occurred in front of me while meditating on a seven-day technique-based meditation retreat, all I should be concerned about is that an experience is there and as such it needs to be understood.[19] This means that investing effort into meditation techniques is fundamentally a waste of time if one is concerned with understanding the Dhamma, and the most one can accomplish is relaxation, a sense of peace coming from withdrawal from the habitual world of senses, or – worse – fortification of the wrong views based on a misinterpretation of the nature of the novelty experiences. Either way, the results of any technique one might engage in, will remain worldly, and will draw its power from a temporary change of one's environment, one's usual way of regarding things. In any case, the "benefits" and "helpfulness" of a chosen technique will simply share the nature of a phenomenon of novelty that one is experiencing. As

such, it means it will run out, and one will have to either do it harder, or change the technique.

If people attend meditation retreats as a form of a temporary escape from the busy and oppressing world, by all means they should do it, as often as they can. However, rather than engaging in a practice of a technique and "sensation watching," they would be better o using their quiet time in trying to understand the nature of things according to the way the Buddha described it, whether sitting, walking or lying down. For it is that "nature" which the Dhamma means and refers to, and anything that is not dealing with this, or anything that is obscuring that very nature (i.e. phenomena) of things, consequently is not the Dhamma, no matter how "helpful" and "useful" it might be.[20] In different words, one's experience is phenomenological (i.e. the five aggregates are all simultaneously present in their respective domains), and this means that nature of things comes first,[21] before anything one does based on that nature. Doing a technique in order to practice the Dhamma (i.e. see the nature of things) is like exiting the house, so as to be in it. It's a contradiction in terms.

8. In the first establishment of mind, the first jhāna, the appropriation of the bodily action (intention) ceases. This is accomplished when that thought, which in ordinary experience stands for that which is the body (and anything originating from it) is seen in its phenomenological nature, i.e. as thought,[22] When the mind is thus established upon the signs and characteristics of one's thought, as an arisen thing, that thought is recognized as being indifferent[23] to anything other than itself, such as body and matter.[24] Through that very indifference, the thought, even if it thinks about the body and

anything bodily, ceases to stand for ‘that’ which is the body (rūpa). This is why the first jhāna is primarily characterized by thinking-and-pondering (vittakavicāra) and it is also why the sensual domain (i.e. domain that is pertaining to the body) has been surmounted. The result of this cessation is the subsiding of speech – the physical, bodily aspect of it. By dropping the appropriation of the bodily intention, through the surmounting of its whole domain, one clearly sees the whole body as an independent thing, just sitting there, already given. Even if one is to make a bodily intention, one would see that intention too, as something that is inevitably and inseparably confined to the bodily domain and as such: as something that can never be “mine”. This is why the first establishment of mind is also sufficient for the final knowledge.[25]

Furthermore, it is because of this very principle of thought ceasing to ‘stand for’ that which is the body, that the jhānas are wholesome in themselves, even if not accompanied by understanding. By “ceasing to stand for” the wrong order of the experience is reversed, and the structurally independent, simultaneously present and indifferent to each other individual domains of the aggregates are experienced as they are, without the distortion introduced by assumption in regard to them. This is why the Buddha praised the practice of jhāna, because if the person develops them correctly, even as a puthujjana, he would require very little instruction in order to understand things and remove all conceivings and avijjā.

1. Which is why in order to correctly do any of the practices found in the Suttas, one needs the right view first.↩

2. Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Clearing the Path, p. 195.↩

3. As recommended in SN 54.9.↩

4. Whether it is “I am breathing in,” or “I shall breathe in,” through mindful repetition the “I” begins to stand out, so to speak, and when paired with understanding, the more it “stands out,” the less it is mine.↩

5. Cf. MN 10.↩

6. This should not be mistaken as “sensations”. See below.↩

7. The same principle applies to the other foundations, namely – feelings, mind and thoughts.↩

8. That which is simultaneously present, but “less” there, less actual.↩

9. Or: “Right in front of us”; to “take them up.”↩

10. This doesn’t mean that any (i.e. fall sorts of contradictory) practice of meditation is being endorsed here. This is because, for a puthujjana, no matter how much effort he makes, if the practice he has chosen or been given is inherently wrong, no right results can come from it. One does not accidentally become sotāpanna, it doesn’t “happen to one” as a blessing. One builds it up, develops it and attains it through “manly efforts,” as the Suttas often say, and because it was not given to one, it cannot be taken away.↩

11. Which inevitably acquired countless mystical connotations that they maintain to this day.↩

12. Cf. SN 54.8.↩

13. Cf. SN 40.1.↩

14. Cf. MN 119.↩

15. Cf. SN 54.8.↩

16. Cf. Sn 1.3,21 (verse 55).↩

17. Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Clearing the Path, p. 75.↩

18. In other words, it is impossible to perform an action which in and by itself would be able to overcome the nature of action, which is the whole point of the Buddhist practice: overcoming kamma. Through action, good or bad or neutral, all one accomplishes is the maintenance of the nature of action: by acting, one remains bound by action. If this would not be the case, the Buddha and the Dhamma would not be required for the freedom from suffering, and all one would have to do is simply perform certain things and by doing so, automatically reach nibbāna, or even better: all one would have to do is choose to be in nibbāna and one would attain it.↩

19. And one also comes to realize that for as long as one is alive, experience is always there, and one doesn't have to do anything in order for it to be so. And this is where the real purpose of a meditation technique becomes apparent: one is after a particular type of experience (regarded as more desirable and lofty) as a form of replacement or escape from another type of experience (regarded as undesirable and unpleasant). "I want to experience this, I

don’t want to experience that (or lack-of-this). Thus, all one is trying to do is experience pleasant by directly displacing unpleasant, i.e. one wants to fulfill one's immediate desire. For as long as one remains concerned and puts value on the particulars of an experience, the nature of it will remain unknown. This is the reason why any meditation of this kind is a meditation that is utterly within the sensual domain and cannot go beyond it, which is what MN 108 (iii, 14) refers to.↩

20. People themselves might often struggle to reconcile the nature of meditation techniques with the nature of the Buddha’s Teaching, but they usually end up ignoring this because it feels like the immediate application of a technique is helping them and makes them feel better. The problem with this is that they, as puthujjanas, have no criteria to determine what “helpful” really is. Thus, they just end up following their own feelings and assumptions again, but this time on the pretext of Buddhism and spiritual practice.↩

21. One can be ignorant of the phenomenological nature only because that nature is there, present.↩

22. Cf. my essay Not Perceiving the Feeling (Meanings, p. 43) where I said that it is the feeling that feels, perception that perceives and thought that thinks (I am paraphrasing).↩

23. This is a type of structural indifference and this can be understood in terms of the superimposition of the respective domains of body (matter) and thoughts. Both of these domains are simultaneously present, but they don’t interfere – they are “indifferent” to each other.

Furthermore, it is not just that they don't interfere, it is that they cannot interfere, even if one is to want it. This principle actually applies to the whole experience, namely: the five aggregates. Crossing from one domain into another is structurally inconceivable, but as long as one does not fully understand that, by not-understanding one conceives it. For more on this cf. my essays The Infinity of the Mind and Not Perceiving the Feeling (Meanings, p. 39 and p.43).↩

24. And this very indifference was obscured through the assumption of 'body' (i.e. matter) in one's thoughts. Cf. Resistance and Designation (Meanings, p. 47).↩

25. "Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints occurs in dependence on the first jhāna…" – AN 9.36 ↩

Breathing Towards Death

Practising the mindfulness of breathing correctly, means practising the mindfulness of death correctly.

The Buddha has offered mindfulness of breathing as a replacement for the practice of mindfulness of death. That was because mindfulness of death pushed some monks over the edge, so to speak. It made them wish for ending of their life before being fully awakened. Yet, it is important to note that mindfulness of breath aims at the *same* result as mindfulness of death does. That result is dispassion towards the world and life (of sensuality) in general. The mindfulness of breathing was a direct response to the need for rapid dispassion of those committed to its practice. This of course doesn't mean that mindfulness of death was wrong, but it means that mindfulness of breath is simply less risky. It cannot be stressed enough though – they both aim at the same result.

Furthermore, this applies for any other "meditation" that we find in Suttas. They might sound very different, but their aim is the same: the establishment of mindfulness. Mindfulness to the extent necessary for the discernment of Dhamma. Thus, we can say that if someone's meditation is not bringing them closer to *understanding* of sensuality and experience of dispassion – that meditation is wrong.

The breath can end at any given moment, and we wouldn't be able to do anything about it. Random organ failure, heart attack, lung collapse, none of these things would be accessible to our will power, yet, our entire life (that same "will power")

directly and simultaneously depends on it. For example, if something were to happen to the vital functions of our body, our life would end that very moment. Regardless of where our hopes and intentions were aiming at the time. This recognition can be very unpleasant for an average inauthentic man of the world and it could result in the experience of a tremendous fear and dread. It is the aim of the mindfulness of death to cut through the manifold layers of that inauthenticity. But, as the Buddha has himself seen, it can sometimes be too much to handle; if a person realizes one's own mortality too fast and is not prepared for it. Hence the mindfulness of breathing comes as a more gradual replacement. A replacement that still, very much, leads in the same direction of recognizing the inherent insecurity of one's own life. This insecurity manifests through realizing the impermanence of breath, *while* one mindfully breathes. So, the difference between mindfulness of breath and mindfulness of death is not in its "object", but in a *point of view.* (or where the mindfulness is anchored in).

In 'death meditation' the point of view is in one's *sense of Self*. This is more "personal" approach (which is why it is sharper, quicker, and thus *riskier*). In 'breath meditation' the point of view is placed on the *intentional act of breathing*. By doing so, one's sense of Self is not in the direct center of the experience. (as opposed to the thought "*I will* die", for example). Either way, one can realize that no matter how volitional an act (of breathing) might be, it is fundamentally rooted away from one's control. (Control that is the exemplification of one's sense of Self.). This becomes clear when one recognizes that *while* breathing, the body (or the lungs, or heart, etc.) could stop working. They *could* fail. That whole dimension, where the failure would come from, would remain entirely "inaccessible"

to one's intentions and will. No amount of one's volition would be able to "cross" that threshold of control that is determined by the present body that is simply "able to breath". (i.e. unobstructed airways, functioning lungs, beating heart, etc.). In simple terms: one's sense of control, intentions, will, sense of Self, are all bound up with presently arisen functioning body. And the *presence* of that body is not accessible to one's will. (If it were so, we wouldn't be susceptible to illness, aging and death.). Recognition of that lack of access to the fundamental aspects of one's own life, is the recognition of *impermanence*. Thus, in mindfulness of breathing, one exposes oneself to the sharp truth of *anicca*, but without winding oneself up through the anxious contemplation of death.

We can go as far as to say that one's life is *completely* rooted outside one's own sense of control. In other words, one's ability to exercise will and control, is something that one has no control over. For example: if something random, (an accident or, a disease,) were to simply block the air passages, no amount of intentional breathing would be able to help us. Yet, our whole life would depend on it.

Correctly discerning this, results in the *right* dispassion. And that means having no desire for either life or death.

The reason why this is very important to see is that many people use a mere pleasure that they derive from meditation as a criterion for their progress. But, pleasure is secondary, and is not something an unawakened being should use to judge things against. Pleasure is not the measure of success, it's the unshakeable composure of peace in the face of death, that is. Thus, one's meditation of breath should establish itself upon

mindfulness of the impermanence as described above. It should not become something agreeable that one uses for not dealing with the world.

A dying man can only rely upon his wisdom, if he developed it. Wisdom is not dependent upon any phenomenon originated upon six senses. It is developed on the basis of the *discernment* of the same. That's why when one's senses start to wither and die, the knowledge of their nature remains unaffected. When there is no wisdom, there will be despair, in the face of death.

Intentions Behind One's Actions

The Right meditation is inseparable from the Right view. That means that even if a person doesn't have the Right view, their meditation should be concerned about getting it. To put it simply – it comes down to developing the self-transparency (or self-honesty) concerning skilful as skilful (*kusala*) and unskilful as unskilful (*akusala*). The Buddha defined the Right view in those very terms – knowing "good as good", and "bad as bad". The person with the Right view knows for oneself, beyond any doubt, *kusala* as *kusala* and *akusala* as *akusala*. By seeing it – he recognizes it. He doesn't need to hold or adopt any other external criteria. The clarity of his vision pertains to here and now, internally. Thus, for someone who hasn't achieved that yet, that's where the meditation should start. Obtaining of the Right criteria and then meditating through it. Keeping it "composed" is the definition of the Right *samadhi*.

The problem is that this kind of instruction is very non-specific. People today usually need something more proliferated and palpable. They require meditation "methods". An average man today wants a "recipe", a prescription of "steps". He needs to know what *exactly* he should *do*, that would then automatically result in his liberation. Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. If we look at the Suttas, whenever the Buddha was talking about meditation it was to bring the fulfilment of knowledge and wisdom. Yet, if a person has none of the latter to begin with, then the fulfilment cannot arise nor be fabricated mechanically. Very often the Buddha's reply on how to meditate would be in instructing people in recognizing and avoiding the unskilful, and cultivating (*bhavana*) of the skilful. Discerning

the nature of *kusala* and *akusala* has the potential of taking the mind above both. Freeing it from action (*kamma*) and it's results (*vipaka*), since they are bound to the domain of skilful and unskilful. And that's exactly why performing (*doing* or *acting*) of the specific steps, cannot take one beyond the nature of *kamma*. Understanding it however, might.

Furthermore, methods and techniques usually don't amount to more than management of the problem of suffering. Management of something cannot actually uproot that very thing. So, instead of that, a person will be better of in trying to discern what kind of attitude towards meditation can be sustained throughout the day. An attitude that wouldn't need any particular favorable environment or special conditions to be applied in. Regardless of whether one is sitting in a full lotus posture, or just walking down the street. One needs to find that kind of *composure* that one can maintain in both circumstances. The way to do this is if the composure is established upon the *general mindfulness*. Not the particular observation and adherence to the prescribed steps of a "meditation" technique, that results in one being *absorbed* in it. Absorption is the opposite of general mindfulness.

Every *jhana* for example is fully founded upon the basis of the unshakeable mindfulness as number of Suttas often mention. So, even if a person wants to do his meditation in a "formal" manner, such as sit for an hour few times a day, that is fine. As long as it is not done for the purpose of developing some sort of "experience of absoption" out of it. Like trying to watch one's breath hoping for some novelty energy release. The point of meditation is to remain *present* as much as possible. Present or mindful of *whatever* is **already there** (feelings, perceptions,

intentions). Not interfere with it, or deny it, or try to replace it. Just discerning the enduring presence of the arisen experience. Emotionally, perceptually and intentionally. That kind of composure can then be "spread out" over one's entire day, even when a person is not sitting down to meditate.

And this should not be too hard to grasp (though that doesn't mean it will be easy to accept). The whole point of the practice of Dhamma and meditation is nothing other than understanding of the nature of things. The understanding that arises on account of mindful discerning of whatever is *arisen* and *enduring* in our experience. And it's that understanding of the unskilful that frees the mind from it. If a person wants to be truly free once and for all, the only way to do so is through the knowledge and mindfulness.

Thus, if one wants to practice in a manner that pertains to this final goal of freedom, he needs to become very mindful and honest about intentionality behind any actions. Simple actions, more complex ones, careless or important, big or small – actions of any kind done by body, speech or mind. One will need to attend to them mindfully until the motivation and intentions behind is fully seen. That is because it is the intention that defines wholesome action as wholesome and unwholesome as unwholesome. The "reason" for one's action so to speak. That's where skilfulness of an action is rooted at. That's also the *real* "reason", the one deep inside that one might not be willing to admit to oneself. If a person is able to reach the full transparency of one's intentional actions and its roots, that person is a step closer in discerning what makes *kusala* as *kusala* and *akusala* as *akusala*. That person is a step closer to the beginning of the Right criteria or view.

So, if one needs to meditate, one needs to be concerned with one's actions and choices. (Which is also why *sila* or virtue comes before the Dhamma). In such manner any motivation for one's intentions behind doing this or that will reveal and not taken at its face value. Through this persistent self-questioning one can also see whether an action that is about to be, is rooted in an unskilful motive. Like sensuality, ill will, vanity or distraction for example. Furthermore, one would need to abandon only *that*. The unwholesome. One doesn't need to cancel the entire arisen experience and behaviour. That would be a form of overdoing it, and not using mindfulness as a criteria of discernment. "Is what I am about to do rooted in greed? Lust? How about ill-will and annoyance or anger?" Or "am I acting out of a desire for distraction and forgetfulness? Am I willingly giving in to acts and desires that would delude me further and mask the unskilful basis of those very actions?" Such questioning about the personal and inner dimension of one's daily experiences and actions will *have to* result in being mindful. This is a definition of (proper) vipassana or investigation, since that's exactly what's being done. Self investigating the motivation behind any actions. And it is obvious to see how this kind of attitude and mindful practice would result in discerning "good as good, bad as bad". How it would not be dependent on any external authority or belief. Instead be a direct, visible, universal criteria seen personally for oneself.

It's important to note it is not necessary that one becomes neurotic or obsessed (though it might happen) about it. Always having to *actually* ask oneself "what am I doing?" before every action. What's important is the *attitude* of such *questioning*. The "answer" is already implied within it. One already *knows* why

one is acting. Whether one is aware of it or not, that's a different matter. Of course, until that attitude is developed and refined, a person will have to endure possible loss of (superficial) confidence and choice paralysis. That's because the implications of one's smallest actions are becoming more revealed. A person starts to feel responsible even for things that are not in his control.

So through this kind of "revealing" of the roots of one's actions, one is simultaneously becoming less and less able to ignore one's true intentions. One will not be able to turn a blind eye towards acting good while the real motivation underneath it isn't necessarily so. That's why this attitude is "self-transparent". Whatever is on the surface, one simultaneously sees beneath it *as well*.

Consequently, one will be able to also see if something is genuinely not rooted in greed, aversion or delusion. In such case even if the whole world comes to tell him that that's still "bad", his discernment would remain unshaken. As mentioned above, that's because good and bad are defined by the intention behind them. Not by the common tradition, views and opinions, duty and culture, but by whether greed, aversion and delusion underlies them.

It should be clear by now that the self-honesty or transparency is not an optional thing (or just one of different ways leading to the same goal). It's an absolute pre-requisite for any chance of getting the Right view and knowing how to practice the Dhamma. If a person still has difficulties in abandoning own dependence upon a particular "method" of practice, they can still take up this practice of self-questioning all the time, as a

“method”. Although not ideal, it will still result in seeing through the motivation and emotional need for any methods in the first place. (Needing “something to do”.) By seeing the subtle motivation under *any* action, one will automatically feel responsible for one’s choices. No matter how “justified” those might seem externally. The weight on it is always on oneself, and that’s something that one cannot ignore any further.

It is also then when the full weight of the Buddha’s “beings are owners of one’s actions” saying, is truly felt.

The Necessity of Celibacy

Practice of celibacy is always beneficial. Even for a lay person, who is not necessarily Buddhist or familiar with the Dhamma. The obvious reason for its benefits is the inevitable increase of the mental strength that comes with the restraint. This restraint is *intentional* and aims at a very powerful desire that otherwise shapes and controls one's whole life. Sensuality/sexuality is something that heavily contributes towards defining one's actions and choices. It is something that has at least some influence in virtually all of them.

Thus, adopting a practice of restraint of the sensual desire, a person will be going against that grain of the natural sexual pull of one's own body. Through willingly imposing this restraint, the mind will be pressured to grow – in terms of strength and in terms of enduring of itself. (As the case with any strength development is. Gradually increasing resistance, increases the capacity to hold the very same.)

Sometimes people think that not having sexual intercourse is all that being celibate means. That doesn't constitute the celibacy we are talking about here. The difference is to not be celibate *only* because the current circumstances are presenting no options, but to actually be celibate as a result of *determination* and *practice of restraint*. (And then one might decide to live in the circumstance that present no options, and that's fine.) It's important to not misunderstand this. We are not saying that one somehow needs to be *tempting* oneself with sensuality. "Flirting" with it, so to speak, to keep reinforcing the practice of saying "no" to it. That's ridiculous. And completely misguided

and countering the right efforts. Flirting with sensuality can only be done out of *sensuality*. (As the Buddha said, it's not possible to have sensual perception without the mind being bound by sensuality.) So, tempting oneself with sensuality, it's already a form of engaging *with* sensuality. As such, it goes against the practice of the celibate determinations.

> **"Firstly, a man who claims to be perfectly celibate does not mutually engage in sex with a woman. However, they consent to being anointed, massaged, bathed, and rubbed by a woman. They enjoy it and like it and find it satisfying. This is a corruption, flaw, blemish, or taint in celibacy. This is called one who lives the celibate life impurely, tied to the fetter of sex. They're not freed from rebirth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. They're not freed from suffering, I say.**
>
> **Furthermore, a man who claims to be perfectly celibate does not mutually engage in sex with a woman. Nor do they consent to massage and bathing. However, they laugh and play and have fun with women.**
>
> **they gaze into a woman's eyes;**
>
> **they listen through a wall or rampart to the sound of women laughing or chatting or singing or crying.**
>
> **they recall when they used to laugh, chat, and have fun with women;**

they see a householder or their child amusing themselves, supplied and provided with the five kinds of sensual pleasures;

They don’t see a householder or their child amusing themselves, supplied and provided with the five kinds of sensual pleasures. However, they live the celibate life wishing to be reborn in one of the orders of gods. They think: ‘By this precept or observance or mortification or spiritual life, may I become one of the gods!’ They enjoy it and like it and find it satisfying. This is a corruption, flaw, blemish, or taint in celibacy. This is called one who lives the celibate life impurely, tied to the fetter of sex. They’re not free from rebirth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. They’re not free from suffering, I say.

As long as I saw that these seven sexual fetters—or even one of them—had not been given up in me, I didn’t announce my supreme perfect awakening in this world with its gods, Maras and Brahmas, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its gods and humans.

But when I saw that these seven sexual fetters—every one of them—had been given up in me, I announced my supreme perfect awakening in this world with its gods, Maras and Brahmas, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its gods and humans. Knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘My

> **freedom is unshakable; this is my last rebirth; now there are no more future lives.'"**
>
> – Anguttara Nikaya, 7.50

So, it's this determination, the decision to not engage with sensuality ever again that makes all the difference. Just like when a person is trying to give up smoking for example. It will be much harder to do so if you bring yourself up to decide to *never* smoke again, as opposed to deciding it to quit it half-heartedly for a month or so. The former would exert much more pressure on an individual and even someone who was not a heavy, but a casual, smoker would feel the whole weight of it. And this is even more true of celibacy. And it is necessary to determine it in such a decisive manner.

Only then the mind will be pushed towards development (provided it doesn't break) of strength on that corresponding level. Anything short of it, the mind will just tread water until the pressure of sexuality builds up, and then inevitably give in. Determining it decisively, however, means that person's entire life will have to be affected by the profound shift in significance of ordinary things in day to day life. This is pretty much the main reason why most of the people would be afraid of doing it.

As hard as it might seem, it is still very much possible to succeed with a persistent effort over a period of time. If one modifies one's environment to support the restraint and to not add more to the already existing pressure, the mind can eventually become dry of the inherent "wetness" of the desires. Then everything in person's life that was depending on the acts of sensuality and non-restraint, will also "dry out". A person would be free from it. This refers to the inherent worries of

protecting what one has acquired, pains of craving towards what one doesn't have yet, obstacles of one's worldly ambitions, and similar. All these things will have no significance any more. They will not be able to cause one to suffer on account of them.

It is also important to mention that the *sooner* one starts this practice the better. It is not uncommon for people to think that they have time to get older and pursue sexual and sensual desires. And that then afterwards, they can practice restraint and free themselves from desires. Unfortunately, it's quite the opposite: the longer one waits the harder it will be to *discern* sensuality and do something about it. With old age, sexuality goes "underground" so to speak. The time comes when the body loses its vigour and the sexuality won't manifest any more in a form of obvious physical behaviour and thirst. This can mislead a person to believe that they are free from it. What actually happened was that sexuality has now descended from something that was discernible (bodily actions and thoughts of such) to something that's virtually invisible. A subtle *background* that becomes a ubiquitous motivation for all sorts of habits, acts and even psychological needs. They wouldn't carry the sensual flavour to them anymore. A flavour that used to be very clear on the surface of them at all. If the mind hasn't made the effort, while the aim of the effort was obvious, it won't be able to do it now. Of course, it is still possible in theory at least. But, when the strength and determination fade with the body, having been left undeveloped for so long, it is very unlikely that that will change. (The Suttas, though, do list few exceptions of very old people reaching arahantship. But those were rare, which is why they were so clearly remembered.)

Thus, the sooner the better. That's also why many people in time of the Buddha were inspired to see young monks and nuns in *prime* of their life. Meaning: they were at the time of their lives when sensuality was still available and easy to get. They have not just given it up, but ended up *enjoying* the practise of restraint and understanding the Dhamma.

> **"Then that devata said to the Venerable Samiddhi: "You have gone forth while young, bhikkhu, a lad with black hair, endowed with the blessing of youth and strength, in the prime of life, without having dallied with sensual pleasures. Enjoy human sensual pleasures, bhikkhu; do not abandon what is directly visible in order to pursue what takes time."**
>
> **"I have not abandoned what is directly visible, friend, in order to pursue what takes time. I have abandoned what takes time in order to pursue what is directly visible. For the Blessed One, friend, has stated that sensual pleasures are time-consuming, full of suffering, full of despair, and the danger in them is still greater, while this Dhamma is directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise."**
>
> — SN 1.20

We must stress here that practice of sense restraint would be beneficial even to those who have no interest in practising the Dhamma – fully or partially. Because if the mind manages to become stronger than the sensual pull, and learns how to go beyond sensual cravings, it will to a great degree go beyond the

burdens that come with the sensuality. Burdens that are otherwise unavoidable and bring much worry and suffering. Going beyond sensuality will also lessen the grip of one's own Ego and all the conceit underlying it would be reduced. The anxieties, lack of satisfaction, guilt over things done in the past – all of that would disappear or be significantly removed. Of course, we can only imagine what greater freedom can be gained, if on top of the steadfast restraint, one also practices the Dhamma instructions towards uprooting even the subtle conceit and cravings.

The entire life of a person most often revolves around following desires. Trying to get what one wants is the most fundamental habit of a human mind. This is quite normal, but the problem is in that *what* people want is almost always rooted in sensuality. One's desires are most often aimed at the pursuit of the pleasures gained through physical senses. Pleasant sights, sounds, tastes, smells and touches. Subtle or coarse. If a man begins to learn how to go against this *sensual* "*grain*" that exhorts pressure on him, that will already mean a beginning of strength. Of course, mere resistance to such sensual cravings will not be able to uproot the sensuality in itself. For that, *understanding* of the nature of that sensuality will be necessary. But this is only possible on the basis of the sense restraint. For example, if a person has been adhering to the practice of restraint and abstaining from *intentionally* giving in to sense desires, that person will be able to see the gratuitous nature of the sensual desire in a form of one's own thoughts. It is something that has arisen completely uninvited, yet pressures one to act upon it as if it is truly owned by him. Sticking to this kind of reflection can reveal that even things that one does want and desire, are rooted and arisen as something that is

fundamentally outside of one's control. One's responsibility lies not in preventing those thoughts from arising, but in choosing to *delight* and *entertain* them. Or not, as the Buddha would tell. In brief: being able to see the uncontrollable (gratuitous) nature of one's own desires, one can overcome the pressure that they exhort on him.

The main reason why most people wouldn't even consider the practice of celibacy is because it's simply too difficult. Because of that it is also unlikely that a man would choose to do it, outside of some sort of philosophical belief or a religious practice. There just wouldn't be enough motivation.

To reiterate: freedom from sensuality starts by giving it up first. Saying "no" to it. That is not optional. This initial effort can then enable a person to allow the nature of desire to *manifest* and *arise*. As opposed to someone who tries to prevent this, or rather cover it up. This cover up is due to instantaneous giving in to the pressure of desire (if not physically, at least mentally). Or it is due to trying to prevent it and deny it. (The former and the latter correspond to sensual indulgence and self-mortification respectively.)

Giving in to the pressure, distracts one from seeing what is it that pressures him in the first place. Denying it, does the same. If one *learns* how to endure it through restraint, then it can become clear that there is no pressure of sensuality *without* one's body. A person at a face value regards one's own body as basis for pleasure. It's seen to be something "free" and "effortless". Something that belongs to "me". That in itself is a sufficient reason for giving in to it. Hence, it's not incidental that the Buddha often compared sensuality to a "bait".

If one contemplates the necessity of the living healthy body for *any* sensual engagements (fleeting or otherwise), it can be discerned that even the pleasures that one can gain from it *belong* to the actual *sense organs*. As in: pleasures are inseparable and inconceivable without them. Thus, if one wants to overcome the entire domain of sensuality, one can do so by overcoming the *ownership* of the sense organs (or the *body* as a whole). And extinguishing of the ownership, i.e. the necessary condition of sensuality, is done by understanding that it was impossible to own the body in the first place. If that were not so, then one's desires would *already* be all satisfied (i.e. there would be no desires to begin with). Alternatively, one can contemplate that if one were the true master and owner of one's own body, that body would not be a *subject* to illness, aging and death. It would not be *liable* to accidents, elements, circumstances, etc. This kind of understanding can only be properly developed on the basis of restraint and celibacy. And once it is developed, then the restraint will become a normal mode of behaviour. It will not be a way of "resistance" to the sensual pull any more, because there will be no more senses that can pull one. Senses and their respective desires are a problem only when they are "mine".

Peripheral Awareness

Mindfulness done correctly is when the mind is *anchored* in something. That something must be a thing that is not directly attended to, but instead, has to be a *reference point* to the attended thing (hence we call it “anchor”). If a thing is not directly attended to but there, we call that thing to be a “background”. It’s a background to a thing we attend (which makes that thing a “foreground”). This is the basic principle of mindfulness, on which we can expand here below.

One begins developing this practice of awareness by being mindful of the experience as a *whole*. For example, one is mindful of ‘being-seated-on-a-chair-reading-a-Dhamma-essay’. That is one’s *situation* at that very time. That is one’s experience as a “whole”. This is always the necessary starting point. What is very important is to prevent the tendency to become absorbed in one particular thing. (Feeling, sensations or perception, and similar). Instead, one has to broaden the mindfulness and become aware of the *generality* of one’s current situation, without losing the sight of the particular either.[1]

Of course, the attempts of discerning the background of one’s current experience will not be perfect in the beginning. One will more often than not fall into a mistake of over-attending one’s experience as a whole. This is a mistake of making that background into an *object* of one’s attention, defining it, clarifying it, trying to keep it in front. These are all ways of making it a *foreground*, which means that then something else will be in place of the background.

The natural tendency is to ask "*What* is then the background?". This is however a wrong question. And it's wrong because we are not concerned with the *content* of the background (or foreground for that matter), which would be the answer to "what?". Instead our concern should be with *nature* of it. So one needs to restrain the tendency to clarify *what* is that "background", and learn how to start discerning the domain of it. The domain of the "*periphery*", its nature, in regard to what is presently *enduring* here.

Thus, something one attends to directly is what a foreground is at the time. It can be anything that is the current object of one's attention. That thing has manifested, and it is enduring as such. That's the basic structural property of one's experience, there is no problem with this. However, if one wants to develop mindfulness, a step further is necessary. That step is developing the peripheral "vision" in regard to that very same foreground object, but *without* making that peripheral vision the new object by *directly* attending to it. The Buddha referred to this as "*yoniso manasikara*", which is often translated as "proper attention". *Yoniso manasikara* is the correct way of attending to the peripheral. *Manasikara* means "attention". *Yoni* means "womb". So when a thing is present in the front, in the foreground, its peripheral background is that very "womb" the thing has "came from", so to speak. *Yoniso manasikara* is womb-attention, or less literally: a peripheral attention.[2]

Thus, the point is to learn *how* to attend. Not so much "what". It's about discerning the habit of "over-attending" and learning how to not resort to it. This habit manifests through either indulging or resisting the object of one's attention. Either way, one is fully concerned with it. This is why one must stop trying

to “observe” one’s experience as an object of one’s attention and instead, acknowledge it and let it *endure* on its own. (Let it persist or change-while-remaining-the-same-thing). Once the arisen experience of one’s attention is allowed to be, then gradually and indirectly, discerning of the peripheral *domain* can manifest.

The most practical way of practising this is through mindfulness of body postures. That’s why these things are often called “foundations” of mindfulness, or “anchors” or “reference points”. It’s because they are *always* rooted in the *background*. (E.g. foundations are *under*; an anchor is at the *bottom*; the reference point is at the *distance*. Under, bottom, away… it means ‘not-here-directly-in-front-of-me’). So for example: while I’m seated, I’m reading an article, actively scrolling through the pages, paying attention to what’s being said in it. Things I’m “doing”, like reading, writing, talking, etc. are things I’m attending to (foreground). And I’m attending to them all *while* I’m *seated*. That’s the reference point that is enough for proper mindfulness. That is what’s the background here. Yet, if I switch my attention and start attending to the fact that I’m sitting on the chair, then the body posture of “sitting” ceases to be the background in my experience. Why? Because I’ve broken the relationship of “referencing”. There is no more “*while*”, since I forgot about the reading, and became concerned with sitting. When this happens, one can either go back to the original foreground, or discern the newly present background in regard to the attended experience of sitting. The new background will have to be something even more *general* than “sitting posture”. And the more general thing in that case is nothing other than awareness of the “body there”.[3]

Body postures are more general than attending to a particular action or perception. But having a "body *there*" is even more general than the postures. Because to be walking, sitting, standing or lying down, one needs to have a *body* in the first place. That's why one can also use the knowledge of "there is body", as the peripheral anchor for one's daily actions and experiences. The presence of one's living body is a fundamental requirement for *any* action. We can go even higher (even more general), as we mentioned earlier, and develop awareness of the phenomenon of Earth, Water, Fire or Air. Or even further, in the practice of more refined *kasinas*, as described in the *Suttas*. The point is that the principle remains the same.

We need to stress that this is something that requires *development*. It's not something that can be just "figured out", or read once and made sense of. It requires a diligent *repetition* of "stepping back" when over-attending one's experience as a whole. And then "stepping in" when ignoring it (under-attending it, forgetting about the background). So, it takes time and effort in order for it to be correctly *discerned* and *recognized*.

The problem with common practice of meditation is that people are encouraged to get "absorbed" into the particular "meditation object". The practice becomes a form of focusing on the foreground at the expense of everything else. And not just that, people end up focusing on the objects twice as hard. This is because their view of meditation is to look and *perceive* the "momentary" foreground (the whole idea of "observing '*sensations*'"). Then within that they try to perceive even more *particular* things. So it's not just the *domain* of the foreground, but the content proliferates further too. In cases like this, the

‘background’, as a foundation of mindfulness that needs to be understood, is even further obscured.

The ‘reference point’ means being aware of something, without having to actively think about it. That’s the basic principle of mindfulness. This should *always* be the basis for *samadhi* (according to the *Suttas*).[4] That is why, if mindfulness and awareness is practised correctly, it will result in *knowledge* of the nature of things. The very definition of knowledge is knowing something without having to actively think about it. The knowledge reappears when it is attended to. One knows what one knows. This is the important point because this type of mindfulness of the background that’s simultaneous with the presently arisen phenomenon[5], results in the establishment of mind (*samadhi*) that transcends *sensuality* and *ill will*. The whole domain (scope) of unwholesome.[6] And that’s why that *samadhi* further results in complete knowledge of liberation.

The catch is in persistent effort of repetition of *learning* how to *attend* to things *peripherally*, without having to “directly” look at them. For a mind affected with *avijja*, the “direct look”, the “*ayoniso manasikara*” always involves *appropriation* and the *Self-view*. And “learning to attend” things peripherally can be done on many different “bases” or “domains” that are structurally present as the background of our attended experience. These domains are the domain of feelings, thoughts, and even one’s intentions (bodily, verbal and mental).

For example, being aware of the *general feeling* present, without trying to *perceive* it as “sensation” (i.e. “in” the body), is another way of establishing the proper mindfulness.

Or, something we often talk about, taking up of personal *responsibility*. If one takes it up, then no matter what the engagement with the particular task is, the background of it (the "womb" of that engagement) is one's own *choice* to engage with it in the first place. Taking up responsibility, means becoming aware of the "background" choices one makes throughout one's life.[7]

Furthermore, taking up responsibility for what one has chosen, a person gets to maintain that mindfulness through the very particular actions one is doing on account of it. And that mindfulness of responsibility is not something they would have to perpetually think about. No, that mindfulness is being *felt* instead. (That's why the initial awareness of *any* form of responsibility is always *unpleasant* and concerning).

The choice behind one's actions is a general *unity*, a *context* of one's acts, that is present in each of those acts individually. Present as a peripheral background. It is because of this that *sila* or *virtue* is a necessary prerequisite for understanding. When one's actions are based on *distortions* of priority (particular sensuality *over* general nature of choice regarding it, for example), one cannot see a clear responsible background while engaged in such pursuits. No perspective, so to speak. So, first actions that maintain absorptions with particularity must be divorced from the unwholesome domain. Then they must be further restrained, by avoiding the distracting of oneself. By undoing wrong way of attending to things. By not cultivating improper attention. Only then can one begin to discern the *signs* of the peripheral, characteristics of the background hereby discussed. Only then one will be able to "grasp the sign

of one's mind" or *cittanimitta*. A necessary requirement for the arising of the Right view.

1. This is why the correct practice of mindfulness results in higher establishments of mind (*samadhi*). For example, this is where mind surmounts the fundamental "generality" of form, by the way of surmounting the generality of earth, water, fire and air. Also, there is a reason that the order of elements always stays the same. They are have a particular structural order of their generality. And one can discern them in that order only.↩

2. That's also why this type of attention is said by the Buddha to be one of the necessary pre-requisites for the arising of the Right view.↩

3. "...or mindfulness that "there is body" is simply established in him to the extent necessary for the final knowledge." – MN 10, *Satipatthana Sutta* ↩

4. "Unification of mind, friend Visakha, is samadhi. The four foundations of mindfulness are the basis of samadhi. The four right kind of striving are the equipment of samadhi. The repetition, the development and cultivation of those same states is what development of samadhi is." – MN 44, *Culavedalla Sutta* ↩

5. Experience as a whole, the 'foreground-without-focusing-on-particular-object-witin-it'.↩

6. Sensuality is *always* concerned with the particular content of the experience. Particular *sight*, *sound*, *smell*, *taste*,

touch. Thus, mindfulness of the peripheral domain to the particular foreground, can result in overcoming it.↩

7. Hence the fully developed knowledge that came from the Right View, results in freeing an individual from his actions (*kamma*). Full understanding of the nature of the "choice" as "peripheral", removes the gratuitous *assumption* (*upadana*) of necessity of the "Chooser" i.e. the Self. Understanding the choice or intentional intention (*cetana*) frees oneself from choosing (i.e. acting).↩

Summarized Transcriptions

05hh- Purpose Of The Precepts

Q: What is the purpose of the precepts?

Nm: The purpose is for developing strength of mind and the first step for achieving that is to be able to say “no” to yourself. To say “no” to your desires, whims, habits and addictions. The main rules on which the practice is based are very practical and necessary. They are not supposed to be held because of a belief or because an authority tells you to, they are kept because they hold, in themselves, the practice of meditation - the development of mind. Think of the precepts as a fertile ground where you can plant seeds in order to grow fruit trees. They are not the tree or the seed, but having a grown tree would be impossible without that fertile ground existing. In that sense, you can see the necessity of the fertile ground being present, you can see the necessity of the precepts. Without them, there is no point in you watering seeds, when you have destroyed the fertility of the ground, when you have compromised the fundamental precepts.

Q: What are you trying to grow?

Nm: You are trying to grow your freedom of mind because it is bound by craving, it is liable to feelings. Which means when pain arises you won't be able to not resist it, when pleasure arises you won't be able but to indulge it. In other words, you are controlled by what you feel and you are controlled because the mind is too weak in regard to what it feels. So if you want to become stronger than all of those things, then the first step to develop that strength is restraint, the ability to say “no”, not to

everything forever, but to certain things which are unwholesome.

Q: Could you explain the precept in regard to eating?

Nm: You eat because it is necessary for the body to live, and not for sensual reasons or escape from boredom, i.e. eating whatever and whenever. You should recognise the necessity of eating and that's what you keep in mind, if you eat enough calories once a day, that is sufficient, there is no good reason to eat more. Eating more than you need is a form of sensuality, it comes from craving.

Q: But in the evening you could suffer from hunger.

Nm: It's not a life threatening hunger. In the evening, if you have eaten enough calories in the morning, you have the desire to eat and instead of habitually just giving in to desire and trying to satisfy it by any means, you instead force yourself to restrain and reflect on it: “Ok, why am I pulled by this desire, why is this hunger controlling my mind? Am I really hungry or am I just bored? Does the sensation of an empty stomach mean that I have to eat?”. Through correct contemplation and restraint you will get to understand where the problem is.

Q: If I eat a meal at night, then I will be free from that desire.

Nm: No you won't. You will be free from hunger, but hunger was not your desire. Yes, there would have been no desire without hunger but hunger is not the desire. Desire is always mental. So when physical hunger affects and controls your mind, then it becomes a desire, which means you might go and remove the physical state but the liability of your mind to be

controlled by the physical state remains. Which means that when the next physical thing comes, you will equally be bound by the same desire, hence you can't satisfy your desire and everybody knows that. You can be choosing and engaging in all sorts of sensuality, but you cannot satisfy that desire because it's not there where you are trying to satisfy it. You are appeasing/satisfying physical circumstances, but those are not what the desire is. Yes, desire is inseparable from those things but it's not those things.

The precepts are basically putting up a boundary fence, making the soil fertile so that you can practice. All the precepts are quite practical. In the beginning the monks were allowed to eat in the evening, they could eat throughout the day but then it became impractical for various reasons, going out at night, facing all sorts of dangers, etc. So then a rule was formulated to eat only at the right time, i.e. you don't go out at night to collect food but only in the morning. It became more practical, and you don't spend the rest of your day planning and being concerned about food, but rather you spend it practising restraint, composure and wisdom.

The eight precepts is what defines a fertile field that is not negotiable. For example, how can you possibly be developing clarity and strength of mind, when you are drinking alcohol that's clearly directly affecting your clarity of mind. You need to eat some food but you don't need to drink alcohol, hence it's always going to be done for sensual reasons. Even when people say that they only drink socially or that people around them pressure them to do so, that's also a sensual reason, because you are basically afraid of adversely affecting your sensual environment. You don't want to upset anyone or be shunned by

your social group. That's quite ridiculous especially if you are trying to develop the strength of mind. How can that be developed if you give in to minor weaknesses or are moved because people laugh and tease you for not drinking. So what? How can you go beyond suffering, when just by someone teasing you, you cannot maintain your virtuous behaviour.

Q: The precepts are not the only work that one must do.

Nm: The eight precepts are the necessary fertile field which is the basis for starting the work. You can have all the fertile ground that you want but if you don't have the correct seeds and if you don't put the work in maintaining the soil, they are not going to grow. The soil will not do the work for you, it's just the soil..

MN 66 - The Quail Simile:

> **"...Then in the late afternoon, Udāyī came out of solitude and went to the Buddha. He bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him:**
>
> **"Just now, sir, as I was alone this thought came to mind: 'The Buddha has rid us of so many things that bring suffering and gifted us so many things that bring happiness! He has rid us of so many unskillful things and gifted us so many skillful things!'**
>
> **For we used to eat in the evening, the morning, and at the wrong time of day. But then there came a time when the Buddha addressed the mendicants, saying, 'Please, mendicants, give up that meal at the wrong time of day.' At that, sir, we became sad and**

upset, ‘But these faithful householders give us a variety of delicious foods at the wrong time of day. And the Blessed One tells us to give it up! The Holy One tells us to let it go!’ But out of affection and respect for the Buddha, and out of conscience and concern, we gave up that meal at the wrong time of day. Then we ate in the evening and the morning.

But then there came a time when the Buddha addressed the mendicants, saying, ‘Please, mendicants, give up that meal at the wrong time of night.’ At that, sir, we became sad and upset, ‘But that’s considered the more delicious of the two meals. And the Blessed One tells us to give it up! The Holy One tells us to let it go!’ Once it so happened that a certain person got some soup during the day. He said, ‘Come, let’s set this aside; we’ll enjoy it together this evening.’ Nearly all meals are prepared at night, only a few in the day. But out of affection and respect for the Buddha, and out of conscience and concern, we gave up that meal at the wrong time of night.

In the past, mendicants went wandering for alms in the dark of the night. They walked into a swamp, or fell into a sewer, or collided with a thorn bush, or collided with a sleeping cow, or encountered youths escaping a crime or on their way to commit one, or were invited by a female to commit a lewd act…

…Recollecting that, I thought, ‘The Buddha has rid us of so many things that bring suffering and gifted us

so many things that bring happiness! He has rid us of so many unskillful things and gifted us so many skillful things!’"

The Buddha: ""In the same way, Udayin, there are some worthless men who, when I tell them, 'Abandon this,' say: 'Why this petty, elementary thing? He's too strict, this contemplative.' They don't abandon it. They're rude to me and to the monks keen on training. For them that's a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.

Suppose a quail were snared by a rotting creeper, by which it could expect injury, capture, or death, and someone were to say, 'This rotting creeper by which this quail is snared, and by which she could expect injury, capture, or death, is for her a weak snare, a feeble snare, a rotting snare, an insubstantial snare.' Would the person speaking that way be speaking rightly?"

Udayin: "No, lord. That rotting creeper... is for her a strong snare, a thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke.

The Buddha: "In the same way, Udayin, there are some worthless men who, when I tell them, 'Abandon this,' say: 'Why this petty, elementary thing? He's too strict, this contemplative.' They don't abandon it. They're rude to me and to the monks keen on training. For them that's a strong snare, a

thick snare, a heavy snare, an unrotting snare, and a thick yoke..."

10hh- No One Wants Sensuality

Q: Bhante, you once said that the only reason one gives into sensuality is because one doesn't want it. What do you mean by that?

Nm: Well, what I meant was that universally, literally every human mind, regardless of the culture, education or religion, when a desire in regard to anything obtainable through the senses arises, that desire is oppressing. Desire is a need, a thirst, a hunger, it pressures you to act. You don't have to act and that's the whole point. As a human being you have a choice. But when desire arises, the automatic response is to give into that pressure of desire, and why would you be giving into the pressure of any desire? It's because it's unpleasant. If the pressure of the desire is neutral or pleasant, you wouldn't then make any effort and spend time trying to gain what your desire wants, because you'll already be at ease. But that desire is already unpleasant and in order for you to try and deal with that displeasure, you just give in to whatever the desire promises. That's what I mean, by engaging in sensuality, you do so to be free from the sensual pressure of the desire. When people say, “No, I enjoy my senses.” That's a mistake, because if they were to stop and think, “When there is an unsatisfied desire, is that pleasant? Is that what I want?” They would realise that it isn't, or, “Can I fulfil desire by giving in to it?” No, you can never fulfil desire, because the point of desire is to stay a desire.

Q: It’s based on non-satisfaction.

Nm: Exactly, it requires non-satisfaction for it to be. That's why if you stop and think about it you realise the only reason you are engaged with sensuality is because the pressure of sensual desire is unpleasant and you don't know any other escape from that pressure other than the temporary release of sensual indulgence.

That's the whole point, whenever you encounter any form of displeasure, your only way of trying to deal with it is through acts of sensuality, which is why and how people turn to food, music, sexual intercourse or even meditation hoping for some pleasurable experience to lift them up when they're feeling down or depressed, they just commit harder to sensual activity, because that's the only thing that seemingly relieves oneself of that pressure. However, you're just making it worse because the more you're dependent on running away from that pressure of sensual desire, the more pressure that desire will exercise over you.

Q: So what should you do?

Nm: Well,in a way, you don't have to do anything. If you start seeing your own sensual desires as something that's controlling you, something that you are enslaved by, then you have to start seeing that ‘nature’ before you give into the desire. And then it becomes obvious, clear as day, that it's very unpleasant. Even sometimes when you can satisfy your desires, but maybe not quick enough, that's unpleasant. Either way, that desire is rooted in a disagreeable feeling, i.e. that pressure that's very unpleasant. So if you want to free yourself from it, you have to first start restraining your senses and from making it worse through giving in to that pressure of desire.

You're training yourself to be stronger than something else. But in order to start doing that, you need to start resisting that thing. If you just habitually give into desire, and at the same time expect to somehow magically be free from the pressure of the desire, well that's just a contradiction in terms. Restraint needs to come first if you want to be free from desire. Then the obvious painful nature of the desire in itself becomes apparent. Initially when people start restraining, they notice more pain and they assume that it's because of their restraint. But it isn't. The restraint cannot cause you pain, it can only reveal the underlying pain of the desire that is already there.

Imagine that you're tied to five powerful animals and they are running towards the objects of their desire, you naturally run with them to avoid that extra painful pull that you will experience if you try standing your ground. The animals are stronger than you, they pull you. It's unpleasant. But that doesn't mean that that initial pain is not there if you run with them. Running with them enables them to pull you even harder. So initially, you have to accept that sharp pain of restraint, which eventually you can see that actually it's not the restraint that's the problem, the restraint just shows you what happens when these animals are pulling in their respective domains. If the animals wouldn't be pulling, there wouldn't be any pain revealed by the restraint. Imagine the animals are tamed and calm, and they just move around slowly and you can just remain seated and not have to run with them. You are restrained, the senses are tamed and there is no pull, no pain.

It's something anybody could benefit from, just learning how to say no to themselves, gradually, in regards to this and that, in regard to unnecessary things like luxuries and indulgences.

Because each time you give in carelessly like that, the animals get more to feed on which means they get more powerful, which means each time they pull you, you'll be less and less able to resist those desires.

Quite often, and I'm pretty sure many people can relate, your own desires take you to places you don't want to be, that you know you will regret even before you go there, yet you can't help it and you're just dragged there. How will it then be when old age or sickness sets in? When your senses start to fail, yet your mind is fully dependent on that pleasure that you get from that temporary satisfaction of your desires. When the only resemblance of relief from any disagreeable feelings, is now taken away. When the senses can't enjoy sense objects anymore, when eyes can barely see, when it's hard to hear, when it's difficult to chew, when the body doesn't move correctly, when it's not young and doesn't have that much energy. Yet your mind is dependent on that constant chasing after sense pleasures and now that's just taken away. How will it be when the unpleasant feelings arise, and they will, and you have even less ground to deal with it.

Q: It will feel like an unwanted solitary confinement.

Nm: Exactly. That's why people are terrified of solitude. They can no longer escape what they have been running away from.

28hh- Sense Of Shame And Fear Of Wrongdoing

Q: Authenticity, self-honesty, sense of shame and a fear of wrongdoing, these are all prerequisites for developing freedom from suffering, but what about guilt?

Nyanamoli: Those necessary qualities prevent you from doing unwholesome things based on greed, aversion and delusion. If you don't have those qualities preventing you from bad behaviour, then there are only circumstances around you preventing you, and if circumstances around you are in favour of shamelessness, then you certainly won't be keeping your behaviour in check. That's why it's good to have a sense of shame, even if you don't necessarily have wisdom or restraint in place, at least that sense of shame will keep you from becoming like an animal in terms of your behaviour. That's why it's called "a guardian of the world". As the Buddha said, if there were no sense of shame, sons would be sleeping with mothers and sisters, and fathers with daughters, it would be as wild as the animal realm.

> **"Monks, these two bright qualities guard the world. Which two? Sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing. If these two bright qualities did not guard the world, there would be no recognition of 'mother' here, no recognition of 'mother's sister,' 'uncle's wife,' 'teacher's wife,' or 'wife of those who deserve respect.' The world would be immersed in promiscuity, like rams with goats, roosters with pigs, or dogs with jackals. But because these two bright**

> **qualities guard the world, there is recognition of 'mother,' 'mother's sister,' 'uncle's wife,' 'teacher's wife,' & 'wife of those who deserve respect.'"**
>
> – AN 2.9

Q: Human beings have an inherent sense of shame. You can sense when you're doing something wrong.

Nm: There is a natural sense of shame, in regard to nudity, body exposure, lewd course words, stealing, lying, and so on. If there wasnt that natural shame, we would be getting up to all sorts of bad behaviour, leading to mental decline and complete chaos. When you're honest and authentic, that sense of shame is what gets revealed. It's not about becoming morally judgmental. That just comes out of ill will and repression. No, if you're authentic, then you realise that there are things that you don't necessarily want to do with others or to be known publicly, which means then, because you're authentic, you wouldn't be doing it. And if you have guilt on account of past behaviours, instead of denying it, ignoring it, you accept the guilt as a result of what you've done carelessly and then next time, it will make you think twice, because you're not running away from the disagreeable feeling of guilt, you're accepting it. And sometimes it can endure for days, and then come back again and again, maybe even for years later, but each time it comes you must accept it.

It's good to be guilt free. And the only way to be guilt free is through fully accepting guilt and then going beyond it. Not by ignoring it or denying it. And that is exactly the case, people feel that inherent sense of shame but they blame society for it. I mean, yes, society has a lot of play in the degree of shaming, but

there is that threshold, which is the natural shame. And some people have more of it, some people have less of it. But then people find that natural shame to be a problem because it can be unpleasant if it's preventing them from doing what they want to do. And then yes, they tend to blame society, or blame the culture, they rebel against it, they try to override it. But that's a completely misplaced effort. The better effort is to accept that there is a place for the natural degree of shame in regard to doing things that are inappropriate, not because someone says so but because you recognise that certain actions lead to your own harm, to the harm of others and do not lead you to wisdom or contentment, and that if there was no sense of shame, you would easily be acting in ways that would not be in your best interest.

For example, you can see the dogs that go into a village because they caught the scent of a female on heat. They sense that they're most likely going to be attacked and maybe seriously injured by all the other pack dogs. But they're just focussed on that female and lose what little perspective they had. Their senses just pull them into that direction where they get attacked and suffer many unfortunate consequences. They can't factor the consequences in because the mind doesn't possess the same powers of reflection as the human mind. That's why they don't have a natural sense of shame. But for most people, they do have that recognition which will be guarding them from going in directions which are extremely unwholesome and lead to further suffering.

Q: How do you develop that sense of shame?

Nm: By becoming more self transparent, by keeping your desires in check. Then you will realise that with or without the sense of shame, you are the one responsible for saying yes to desires and following them, because it doesn't matter what thoughts your mind might be presenting you, in forms of the desire, possibilities for things you want to do, that doesn't matter. What matters is whether you accept it, following through with it or not. So with self-honesty, you don't blame society, the government, you don't blame your genes, "Oh, that's how I was born". Even if all those things are in play, you are always responsible for the consequences of your choices. For example, a person trying to give up an addiction, can reflect on the consequences of their actions, but when that desire is present they don't see consequences relevant on the same level, as where the addiction is, but if you are self honest, you will be able to allow whatever pressing desire arises and have enough space to not give in to it, to not be hooked by it. However, you have to start seeing benefits even in that initial restraint. If you don't, then it wont work. There won't be enough ground for any proper development, because without that basic restraint beforehand, you won't be able to allow desire to come close without you acting upon it. As soon as it arises, you'll be acting upon it. The restraining prevents it, it doesn't mean it's gonna make things easier, but it will be more peaceful later on. The mind grows from it and until then, it's gonna reveal the underlying pain beneath the desire and lack of restraint.

29hh- What Is Wisdom?

Q: What is discernment or wisdom?

Nm: It's knowing the Nature of things, knowing things in their Nature. That doesn't mean gathering up or retaining information about things, that's on the level of intelligence, which can help, for example, with getting some information about where or how to look for the Nature of a present experience, Nature of feelings, Nature of perception, Nature of suffering, Nature of things that matter. Wisdom is not dependent on a high degree of intelligence or vast amounts of information storage, but by the right effort you put towards discerning the Nature of things that matter. People are born with different degrees of intelligence, but wisdom is developed, through effort, restraint, calming of your mind, or not giving into craving and desires- the "corruptions of the mind and weakeners of wisdom".

Q: What is the Nature of things?

Nm: Things differ in their particular nature, but universally, they share the same Nature. For example, the Nature of all *sankharas*/determinations is *anicca*/subject to change and *dukkha*/unsatisfactory, and the Nature of all *dhammas*/things, is *anatta*/they cannot be owned, they cannot be yours, they don't belong to you, they are there and you can use them,but you're making a grave error in maintaining your assumption of ownership in regard to them. That's the root of all the problems. It's not the usage of things, it's the assumption of ownership that you maintain on that mental level. That's the Nature you

want to be concerned about. As in, you can investigate other natures, but that's all relative, you want to come to the root, the ‘Nature of all things’, which is impermanence, unsatisfactory, and cannot be yours. That's all that really matters.

Noble wisdom or discernment takes you beyond things, you're no longer affected by them. You cannot be accessed by them. Why? Because you have removed that assumption of ownership which was based on *avijja*/ignorance. If you fully understand that things are not yours, you will no longer be emotionally affected by what happens to them. That is wisdom. That is elevation of the mind, which means a greater perspective on things. All the decisions that intelligent and non-intelligent people make in their life, is based upon the height or degree of their perspective. The greater the perspective, the wiser they become. They might not necessarily be ultimately wise and know the way out of suffering, but they're certainly wiser in relation to those who have no perspective, who are just like animals, slaves to their senses and sense desires, overwhelmed and absorbed into sensual perceptions. So that's another way you can describe wisdom - it's the height of your perspective. The higher the wisdom, the less of an emotional involvement with things you have, which means that the ultimate wisdom is the complete surmounting and detachment from feelings and suffering.

30hh- Four Noble Truths

"And what, bhikkhus, is the majjhima paṭipada/middle-way to which the Tathāgata has fully awakened, which is useful for cakkhu-karani/insight, ñāṇa/knowledge, upasamāya/calming, to abhiññā/understanding, to sambodhi/awakening, to Nibbāna? It is, bhikkhus, this ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga, that is to say: 1-sammā·diṭṭhi, 2-sammā·saṅkappa,3-sammā·vācā, 4-sammā·kammanta, 5-sammā·ājīva, 6-sammā·vāyāma, 7-sammā·sati, 8-sammā·samādhi. This, bhikkhus, is the middle way to which the Tathāgata has awakened, which is useful for vision, which produces knowledge, and leads to calming, to full understanding, to awakening, to Nibbāna.

Furthermore, bhikkhus, this is the dukkha ariya·sacca/noble truth of suffering:
1- jāti/birth is dukkha,
2-jarā/decaying is dukkha,
3-maraṇa/death is dukkha,
4-association with the disliked is dukkha,
5-separation from the liked is dukkha,
6-not getting what one wants is dukkha;
7-in short, the pañcupādānakkhandhā/ five assumed aggregates are dukkha.

Furthermore, bhikkhus, this is the dukkha·samudaya ariya·sacca/the noble truth of the origin of suffering:

**1-Taṇhā/urge/inclination/craving/desire,
2-which perpetuates being, 3-connected with craving and passion,
4-finding delight here or there,
5-that is to say: kāma-taṇhā/sensual desire, bhava-taṇhā/desire for being and vibhava-taṇhā/desire for non-being.**

**Furthermore, bhikkhus, this is the dukkha·nirodha ariya·sacca/the noble truth of the cessation of suffering:
1-the complete virāga/dispassion,
2-nirodha/cessation,
3-cāgo/abandoning,
4-paṭinissaggo/giving up,
5-mutti/release and
6-anālayo/detachment from that very taṇhā.**

**Furthermore, bhikkhus, this is the dukkha·nirodha·gāminī paṭipada ariya·sacca/ the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering: just this ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga/ noble eightfold path, that is to say:
1-sammā·diṭṭhi/right view,
2-sammā·saṅkappa/right resolve,
3-sammā·vācā/right speech,
4-sammā·kammanta/right action,
5-sammā·ājīva/right livelihood,
6-sammā·vāyāma/right effort,
7-sammā·sati/ right recollection,
8-sammā·samādhi/ right composure."**

– SN 56.11

Q: Ajahn, can you describe the Four Noble Truths - suffering, the origin, the cessation and the path to cessation?

Nm: First and foremost, those are four aspects of one insight, that insight being, freedom from suffering. If you're free from suffering, then it already implies the knowledge of what suffering is, the knowledge of what has been causing that suffering, the knowledge of freedom from suffering and knowledge of how that freedom from suffering is brought to fulfilment. It's not like 1-2-3-4 steps that a person needs to discern one by one, it's about understanding suffering and freedom from it.

The cause of suffering is nothing other than craving, which is something that people might just read over because it seems to make perfect sense. One might think that they perfectly understand what that means, but, in terms of the direct insight or understanding that ‘craving is suffering’, that should result in liberation from that suffering. ‘Seeing/Understanding the craving as suffering’ means ‘abandoning the craving’. So the only reason you crave is because you don't real y see it directly, you don't understand it, you haven't discerned that truth despite having read about it. The important aspect is to recognise that whenever there is suffering present (including the liability to suffer), you can induce correctly, that the craving must be present because the suffering is there.

When the suffering is present means it's because simultaneously with it, there is craving present. The absence of that craving simultaneously means the absence of that suffering, there is no delay. That's why you can have direct

knowledge of freedom from suffering directly veri ed for yourself, “Oh, I cannot suffer amidst things that used to make me suffer, the mind cannot suffer now because there is no more craving in regard to those things.”

> **“He whom life no longer torments, who does not grieve at death, If that immovable one is one who has seen the state of peace, in the midst of sorrow he does not sorrow.”**
>
> **For the monk who has cut off craving for being, whose mind is at peace, Having totally destroyed the perpetuation of birth, for him there is no more being."**
>
> – Udāna 4.9

Q: How to abandon craving?

Nm: By developing virtue and sense restraint to the extent necessary, whereby you start discerning your mental intentions, whether they're rooted in wholesome or unwholesome, whether they're rooted in greed, aversion, delusion, and when you know that they are, you do not engage in them, you do not tolerate them, you do not entertain them, you do not proliferate or invest in them. That will enable the mind to then not resist the unpleasant feeling, to not indulge the pleasant feeling, to not try to distract yourself from a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling. And when the mind stops doing that, with the previous knowledge that it received from outside, through the Suttas or a wise teacher, with the previous knowledge of what craving is, you will be able to see, “This is the absence of craving”, and you will be able to see

right there, “There is no suffering”, and then you will also be able to understand what that suffering was, even the suffering of the past, before you understood the way out. You wouldn't be suffering on account of that either. The same knowledge will be applied to the present, past and future.

Q: How to endure those painful feelings?

Nm: If you want to give into sensuality, ill-will, or distraction, you don't give in, that will result in you enduring them.

Q: Then how does one know that one is free from craving?

Nm: When there's no suffering amidst things that used to be suffering. There's no suffering because you cannot suffer, not because you're hiding away or just avoiding things. Avoiding things means you're afraid of something already. For example, say a person doesn't leave their house, because they don't want to talk to anyone, because it might annoy them, and then they'l suffer. They are not free from suffering, they're just protecting their precious environment of circumstantial non-disturbance, but the fact that they must protect it means that they are disturbed, which means they're not free from suffering but only hiding away from the greater extent of their suffering.

You need to have self honesty. So, if you know that you're not hiding away, not indulging in sensual pleasures, not covering anything up, then with that self honesty and restraint of the senses, seeing the danger in the slightest fault, moderation in eating, that will result in being mindful of your actions. Which means that the mind is already developing a certain perspective which is needed to discern the intentions behind your actions.

There is no craving without intention, but there is intention without craving. That's why an arahant can still intend, decide and choose, but he has no craving. In order for you to see that, you have to see the intentions, and most people are not even aware of their mental intentions. They think intention is an obvious choice. But it's not, it's a subtle inclination. Thoughts in themselves are already intentional. It's subtle and in order to reach that subtle level, sense restraint and virtue, moderation in eating and mindfulness is absolutely necessary. Paired with the right instruction, and the right way of looking (*yonisomanasikara*), that's where the practice is. Without the right instruction, it's just restraint, which is good, but it doesn't lead you to any knowledge. With the right instruction and that way of living (which brings about a greater perspective), that's all you need.

Sometimes people might think, "Restraint is not the Dhamma". That's true, and then they would think, "Okay, well, now I got the Dhamma. So now I don't have to restrain myself". No, Dhamma applies only where the restraint is. Yes, restraint is not the Dhamma, as in, the application of the Dhamma is not the same as the necessary basis for that application, but you wouldn't be able to apply it if there is no necessary basis.

If the mind practices like that, with self-transparency, then the inclination in the form of craving becomes more and more obvious. Why? Because you start recognising that in certain ways that you intend or incline, you suffer, you make yourself more liable to suffering, you feel too much, you become emotional y sensitive, you become too involved, you become exposed to future suffering, and by discerning those things, you

stop intending like that, and by not intending like that, you're not perpetuating the craving.

Craving is always in relation to feelings. In a present agreeable feeling, you have to discern the inclination towards wanting more of it, wanting it to stay longer, wanting it to not go away too soon, wanting to increase it, to intensify it, to prolong it, any of those things. In a disagreeable feeling, be it a general disagreeable mood or something more specific, you have to discern the inclination towards resisting it, towards trying to find the justification for it, towards trying to nd an explanation for it, towards psychologizing it. Any of those things are just mechanisms that you try to engage in, so to remove it, to get rid of it. And the subtlest of feelings is the neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant, when paired with craving, results in inclinations towards distraction, delusion, indolence, laziness, mental heedlessness.

If you don't incline towards a present feeling, in any of those three ways, you will no longer be feeding *taṇhā*/craving.

Q: One should then be aware of feelings?

Nm:...to the extent that they have arisen on their own. Feelings arise, and having arisen, they cease on their own. You have no say in that. That's what ‘mindfulness of feeling’ means 'discerning their nature', knowing that they have arisen on their own. For example, this present pleasant experience has arisen on its own. That's fine, so you don't have to try to get rid of it, thinking, “Arisen pleasure means craving!” No, it doesn't. Leaning towards that pleasure means craving. Leaning away from the displeasure means craving. Leaning towards

forgetfulness and distraction when there is neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling, means craving.

Q: So really you have to be aware of those leanings?

Nm: Yes, that's a good way to start. You can't see craving directly, because craving is in your attitude of “leaning”. You can bring it down so precisely whereby you can see, either the presence of suffering or the possibility to suffer. You can use that knowledge to see the ‘leaning’.

Q: There's no method that can show you that?

Nm: No, because method is on the level of bodily action or bodily perceptions, where you're just perceiving or going through some motions. We're talking about the intentions behind your actions. So whatever meditation method/techniques or bodily act you do, you still have to look at the intention behind that, which means that a “meditation method” becomes redundant, which means the only necessary method is your sila and sense restraint. That is the closest to a right method as you can get.

Q: So it's not about doing a meditation of observing bodily-touch sensations or breathing techniques, etc. which will reveal the truth or remove my craving?

Nm: That's a completely misplaced effort, because you are looking in the wrong place. You're not seeing your intention to observe sensations. Your intention is not in the sense of bodily touch or in the movement of your breathing. Observing bodily sensations, audible sensations, visual sensations, etc, is an action which is already intended, which is already “leaned

towards and away from" and you're not seeing that, by not seeing that, no amount of engaging in sense perceptions, will reveal its nature. Otherwise the Buddha would have given such a method and described it in the Suttas. When they did ask him about a direct method, he said, a young man develops faith and goes forth, leaving his household life, he lives restrained by the rules of *patimokkha*, practices sense restraint, sees the danger in the slightest fault, moderate in eating and devoted to wakefulness, mindful and aware, dispelling the hindrances, and practicing jhana.

I remember the first time I read that as a layman, I was also looking for a method. And I thought, "Well, this instruction is just too general, why wouldn't he just give you a particular recipe on how to become awakened?", because there isn't any, this is the most particular you can get. If you're not seeing it in a direct manner, it's just because of all of the wrong views you are looking with. You need to meet the Buddha's instruction halfway basically, or even two thirds of the way to start making sense of it. But if a person doesn't change their views and only adds to the top of their views and notions of what the practice is, that's when you get methods such as modern day vipassana, visualisation or concentration techniques.

You have to discern the intention behind your action and you can't concentrate on that because it's behind your act of concentration. You can only discern it, you can know it.

Q: You can't attend to or concentrate on your intention, you can only be aware of it.

Nm: You can be aware in a peripheral background manner, but attention or concentration in terms of techniques is not the

same thing. People are not aware of the background, when they're doing meditation techniques, quite the opposite, they absorb into the foreground, trying to narrow things down. They're practising a focusing attention exercise on one thing or the other, which means that there's no general awareness there, and if they hear about ‘general awareness’, that becomes a thing which they try to focus on.

Your intentions can only be seen indirectly on the basis of sense restraint and sila. You can't see them indirectly if you're unrestrained or restrained and looking in the wrong place, such as focusing on objects of your attention.(In both cases your attention is leaning towards the foreground of senses objects and you are oblivious to the background) (In that sense common meditation techniques are redundant)

Having enough clarity generated to the point of being able to fully discern the background, will not come about if you are not restrained in virtue and a meditation technique cannot replace that. If you are restrained in virtue, you don't need a meditation technique, because your intentions will be clear enough for you to then start the work of bringing about the end of craving by no longer giving in to it.

On Nanavira Thera's *Notes on Dhamma* - "Anicca"

Q: This is in regards to Ven. Nanavira's, shorter notes on anicca and the sutta quotes found there :

> **"In the Khandha Samyutta (iv,6 <S.iii,38>) it is said of rūpa, vedanā, saññā, sankhārā, and viññāna: uppādo paññāyati; vayo paññāyati; thitassa aññathattam paññāyati. ('Arising (appearance) is manifest; disappearance is manifest; change while standing is manifest..."**

It seems at first glance, one would think that the order would be different, that it would be "arising, then changing while standing, and then ceasing". Is there a reason why it isn't in that particular order?

Nm: Because that order is rooted in a wrong view of the external point of view in regards to the experience, in regards to the fundamentals of space and time. People assume the external world, which is independent of me and my experience, and that external world possesses time in which we are placed, so to speak. So, 'time', stands for that external assumption of yourself. You think that you have arisen and you're enduring and then you're ceasing, but that requires an external reference point to see that kind of flow, which is actually impossible to see because you can't step outside of yourself. You can have that notion of a flow, or of flux in regards to external things around you, in regard to objects of your senses, but you cannot have that kind of reference point in regards to your own senses.

That's why it can only be described and seen internally, phenomenologically, which is how the Buddha described it, "arising is manifest, or disappearing is manifest, or changing while standing is manifest". If you look at the nature of arising, it's like fading in, which means there is no first point before which thing wasn't and then it is, as though you can catch the moment where it appeared, that's impossible, that can only be done in an external manner. But when you're trying to apply to your own situation, and the senses, the sense bases, you cannot see it like that.

If you look at it, you see that it's either already fading in or fading out. Doesn't matter which, it is persisting while changing or changing while standing. Why? Because if you have something 'fading in', it means it's increasing in its presence, which means it's staying the same thing while it's increasing its presence. And that's just another way of saying it's 'changing while remaining the same'. If something is fading out, as in, it's de-intensifying in its presence. Again, it stays the same thing, you can still designate it as the same thing, while it's changing as in 'fading out'. So whether it's arising or disappearing, you can say that it's persisting while changing, just in a different direction.

That's why the Buddha described it in that order: *"arising is manifest, ceasing is manifest, persisting while changing is manifest"*, the three ways of looking at an arisen phenomena, either intensifying or de-intensifying, which, either way, is to see it as changing while remaining the same.

Q: What's often heard in meditation instructions, is this idea of having to watch things constantly change, and or trying to

capture nanosecond changes so that you can have an insight etc.

Nm: Yes, it's unfortunate but not surprising. The external point of view of ourselves is one of the fundamental wrong views that can be manifested. It can manifest itself in different ways but contemporarily, the most common way is the scientific outlook. As in you see yourself inhabiting this public world, that is there before you and it's going to carry on after you, But any notions of the world that you can have, it's based on your experience as a whole and your sense bases. Thus, you having a view that it's independent of *"that because of which"* that view is there in the first place, that's why it's a wrong view.

Any notion of flux requires a non-changing reference point. So, you can see things are flowing against THIS. And you can do that in regards to your sense objects. But you cannot do that in regard to your sense bases, as in, you cannot step outside of the five aggregates and your situation as a whole and then see it constantly changing or even worse, measure the nano fractions of it. That's unthinkable. But you can come up with a pleasing theory and a very neat description of it. But that would require a person to inhabit the wrong view of the external world in regards to himself and then everything will make sense. But because it's rooted in that misperception of the fundamental aspects of your situation, it cannot result in any knowledge or wisdom.

Q: He writes shortly after:

> **"These three sankhatassa sankhatalakkhanāni (Anguttara III,v,7 <A.i,152>), or characteristics whereby what is determined (i.e. a sankhata**

dhamma) may be known as such (i.e. as sankhata), concisely indicate the fundamental structure in virtue of which things are things—in virtue of which, that is to say, things are distinct, one from another. It is also in virtue of this structure that all experience, including the arahat's, is intentional (see CETANĀ) or teleological (i.e. that things are significant, that they point to other, possible, things..."

Nm: "Changing while remaining the same," requires at least two different levels of that generality, requires a certain sameness while within that, simultaneously present to that sameness, that thing is changing, until it's changed to such a degree that then abruptly you just see how it's a different thing present there, as in your experience has changed. So, that in itself is already intentional. The things on the lower level of generality, that's why he talks about the fundamental structure, are bound by that general determination of 'still being the same thing'. When that changes to a greater degree that determination ceases. And that's the basis of any intentionality. That's the basis of any choices you can make. The possibilities that are implied in the given experience as a whole, are within that experience as a whole. And in return, they actually determined that experience as a whole for how you know it.

41hh- Contemplation and Awareness

Discerning the background

Thaniyo: In terms of contemplating the 32 parts of the body, how do you do that correctly? You actually cannot see your brain, your lungs, intestines, etc. And when you think about it, when you want to contemplate your brain, your lungs, etc, then what is there is actually an idea, a thought. So actually now I'm attending to that thought, and then I'm picking up the signs of those things.

Nyanamoli: Yes, that's the difference there. The only way people approach this, the only way they would know how, is through attending—in other words, they would be attending that thought as if that's really attending to your brain, which you can't. So, the only way to see these body parts correctly, in the relevant contemplation manner, is indirectly, without attending to them directly as objects of your attention. You are to discern them as that-because-of-which you are here living, attending to things.

That's the difference between doing body contemplation rightly and wrongly. Wrongly is basically just repeating these parts, visualizing them and thinking that that somehow equates to understanding them. It might provide you an initial kind of reduction of sensual craving, because you never think about those things, but very soon you'll get used to it and it'll become meaningless because you can't see those things directly. That's why in paṭiccasamuppāda the saḷāyatana (the six-sense base) is the ultimate indirect, it's the ultimate peripheral. It's the

ultimate that-because-of-which-there-is-the-world-for-you, that because of which you are the perceiver, you are the conceiver of it. That's why when the Buddha describes the six-sense base, it's described in that almost external, medical manner—the fleshy eye, the nose and so on—because that's the closest you can see it. You can't see it directly: you cannot attend to your eye, you can only attend to the object.

But that's not the eye because of which you see things. You are misconceiving it, thinking that that's the eye because of which you see things. You start assuming that you can attend that because of which your attention is there. You have to stop trying to attend to the eye, the nose, and start discerning it as a basis, as a physical basis for the world to exist for you. In the same sense, you can be attending to a cup, attending to a table, attending to the image of your brain, but you're just regarding these things as overly objectified objects of your attention. In a way, they have something in common—they're all material. But you don't want to regard your brain just as you regard a cup, because a cup is insignificant to you—you want to discern that that objective brain that you're thinking about is the reason for your subjectivity, because of which you're able to attend to the idea of the brain in the first place.

Thaniyo: So, I have to keep reminding myself of that?

Nyanamoli: Well, you might have to initially, to remind yourself to recreate the right order of things—so that you can dwell on it—but after a while, you don't have to: it will be enough just to remember it, because you will know how to look indirectly. You will know how to see things without having to look at them.

People might misunderstand when I mention ‘the simultaneous presence’. They might end up thinking it’s like two things at the same time, momentarily present in front of you. But when I say ‘simultaneous presence’—and that is the way the Suttas talk about it—it’s basically two things that are present on two different levels. It doesn’t mean they are there equally present at the same time for a second or two, and then you must catch them both at the same time. It is not like that, because you are just trying to catch one thing. You can divide it into a mil ion sub-parts—your attention is still looking at that foreground of an object.

But when we talk about the simultaneous presence, we are saying it endures: the peripheral endures. For example, you have an image of your brain, but you don’t overly attend to it as a random object in the world of which you tell yourself “This body is not mine.” It is not like that, but you have to see that image of the brain without misconceiving it, and then you start discerning that this is the closest you can get to that which your life actually depends upon, that form. The closest you can get is through these images of the brain, lungs, heart, blood, and so on. You realize all of them stand for that, because of which you are conscious here living this life, but you can’t possibly enter that brain in the way of accessing it through your perception, or anything like that. Why? Because it precedes it. But you can know that the image of the brain that you have on that peripheral level is that because of which you’re able to be present here and now, and attend to these various other things that arise. In other words, when you stop thinking about the brain, your knowledge that that’s the order of your experience —meaning you’re undermined by the matter—doesn’t change.

That's what I mean when I say it's simultaneously present. You don't have to keep thinking about it. You can actually forget about it, but rightly. It would basically constitute rightful forgetfulness, which is when your forgetfulness does not induce avijjā anymore. You don't have to keep thinking—it's impossible to keep thinking about everything all the time.

Thaniyo: That makes sense since you can't really think "Brain… brain… brain" all the time.

Nyanamoli: Exactly, because you just keep forcing it into the foreground, and then you fail to see what the peripheral is, which means you have now overly misconceived the brain and you're making it into an object of your perception, which it is impossible for it to be. The eye cannot see itself.

Let me say it like this: for example, you think about the brain rightly, peripherally. You discern the image of the brain, meaning you recognize there is the brain in here because of which my experience still exists, and then you stop thinking about it. And then three hours later you think about it again, and it's important here to introduce the attitude if you have to—eventually, you will recognize it as such. It's important, when three hours later you think about the brain again, you recognize that it's the same brain that has been here this whole time. The fact that you forgot about it did not make it not there.

The same applies with moods or feelings. For example, you have a present mood arisen—it's sort of agreeable, but then you start attending to more particular things, and of course you don't go around thinking how agreeable your day is. But then, later on, four or six hours later, you look back and you remember it again—that it was agreeable. It's the same mood.

And that's what I mean when I say you have to let it endure. That means that when you bring it back, you don't make it yours, but you recognize it as it has been enduring on its own. That's how you start discerning the simultaneous principle I'm talking about. Simultaneous in the sense that the general mood —the general notion of the matter being there—for example, in the contemplation of the body—it's been there enduring on its own, whether you thought about it or not. So, when you do remember, you will eventually stop giving priority to the thought "I remembered this" and "I'm attending to this" and "I'm practicing this"—you will just find it. It's simultaneously present with everything else you do, when you don't attend to that. It's the necessary basis, basically, for your action, for your choice, for your attention.

Thaniyo: So, we should develop the domain, the background. So, one wants to develop it but in the process of that, he forgets about it.

Nyanamoli: You develop it by learning how to discern that it's already there.

Thaniyo: Sure, but then…

Nyanamoli: Then you have to forget about it.

Thaniyo: After a minute?

Nyanamoli: After a minute, that's fine. Then when you remember it, you want to abandon the attitude of "I must restart this practice because I forgot about it." Instead of that, you want to develop recognition and think: "Oh, yes, it's still there." That's pretty much the crucial difference that I'm talking

about. Many people say “Be here now… be present… just feel… just this, it’s just like that” and whatnot, but it all revolves around just telling yourself: “Come back to the present moment, come back to the present moment.” You want to recognize that when you come back to the present moment, you can only do so because it was there enduring beforehand.

Then you realize you can’t forget about it even if you want to. You’re responsible for your own ignorance, because you’re responsible for the attitude of thinking you have to hold it in front of you and that’s the only way for it to exist. You forget about it after a minute, then you remember it after five minutes, and then you think “Oh, crap! I forgot about it. I must do it again now,” as if you are the one who does it to begin with. It is not like that! Each time that attitude arises, you include that attitude in your mindfulness as well because it’s not rooted in you, but it’s rooted in the enduring background.

That’s what the mind is—the ultimate background, citta nimitta. That’s why it is said: “He knows the mind as exalted or as shrunk or as depressed or as elated.” These states that people almost automatically appropriate are your state of mind. As such, it endures. Five days later, you remember it again. The only reason you can remember it, is because it’s still there enduring to some extent. And what will that do, this kind of practice of mindfulness? Well , you can’t be treading water with it. If you keep doing it, it is forcing you basically to shift the center of your experience from your sense of self into the background of things, and even the actual things that you’re attending to, because you realize that they’re there because of the background, you start squeezing your own sense of self out. There is no room for it in the experience because whether you

look at the background, or whether you're attending to the foreground, you realize this can be done only because these things endure on their own, beforehand.

Therefore, stop worrying about not forgetting, but instead start focusing on discerning whenever you remember and don't misconceive whenever you remember. And the most fundamental misconceiving is the idea "mine", meaning that "I am" here, at the center—not this thing that I remembered because of which I am in the first place.

Thaniyo: If I understand correctly, whatever I attend to, at any given time, that must induce a remembering of the way things are.

Nyanamoli: Well , you don't even have to say it like that, but you can just say: "Whatever I attend to, just be aware of what I'm doing." Include yourself in that picture. And where that sense of self is, that's already where the background is. Instead of feeling that each time you remember, you must restart the practice and then hold it as long as you can. Then you drop that whole attitude of trying to remember but instead, whenever you remember, even if it's once a day, you still don't think: "Oh, now I remembered, I must hold it." Instead you should think: "I remembered it, it's already there, arisen beforehand. Not mine, not for me, not myself. It cannot be mine." And that automatically affects everything else within that background, within that peripheral.

It's going to take time to see that because now the emphasis is on what you attend to—that's what matters. In practice you are thinking: "I'm attending to this, I'm attending to this," and then you forget and try to remember it again. But that is not the way,

because the only reason you can attend to anything is because it is there given as an option, which means it exists on the peripheral, where the possibilities exist.

Things are genuinely impermanent, and cannot be owned, and cannot be control ed. But you can't see that because you depend on telling yourself that things are genuinely impermanent, cannot be owned and so on. You can attend to all sorts of things, but that thing is still there on its own, that's the important bit. That's how you shift it onto the phenomenon that has arisen and is enduring, not onto you attending it. That's how you place yourself second basically. And when the sense of self is second, it's not a sense of self any more. To have the sense of self it has to always be the first, the master.

Thaniyo: Then I might start thinking about other things.

Nyanamoli: If you start thinking about other things, you use the same principle of all owing your mind to get established on the significance of that peripheral, and then let it go. Let your mind think about other things.

Basically, establishing that significance would create that enduring context. But you don't have to keep thinking "this is the context", because it's there. You just let it endure. And then you might wonder what to do then. You don't do anything. You let your mind think. Just make sure it doesn't go into sensuality, ill-will or cruelty. That's it. That's all you have to do. Just prevent it from going there. If it doesn't want to go there, you don't have to do anything. That's how you make your own sense of self redundant.

Thaniyo: What about doubt?

Nyanamoli: That's also how you go beyond doubt. If your mind is established on the peripheral—upon the nature of an enduring phenomenon—no amount of active movements of your mind, all of that is secondary to that enduring significance that you've established, so you can't doubt it. You can doubt what you're attending to, but the background of your attention is that which you cannot attend to, and you cannot doubt that if you start discerning it. If you keep confusing it and thinking that you can attend to the background of your attention—in the same sense you think you can see the eye because of which you see—then you're still affected by doubt.

That's what Ven. Ñāṇavīra was talking about when he wrote about the self-identity of a self-enduring phenomenon that people confuse with their own self-identity. The identity of that thing is still there, it's still the same thing. In that sense, you are responsible for establishing your mind correctly, only to let it go and all ow that establishment to endure. If done rightly it will endure. That's how you enter jhānas.

That's why it was said in the suttas that a monk doesn't think "I am entering the jhāna now", or "I will enter the jhāna." But he sets up his mind, he sets up the right significance, and then the mind gets established upon the theme of jhāna. And that's why, while that theme is enduring, all that is implied is the phenomenon of the fact that nothing that is taken as 'mine' can be owned. Yet it's the reason because of which you are there in the first place. If you establish your mind like that, then you won't be able to think—for as long as such a phenomenon is enduring—"I'm doing this and that" because it's not rooted in you anymore—it's rooted in a proper foundation, which is the

foundation of the inaccessible matter: the five aggregates that cannot actually be owned.

Thaniyo: How do we know if the knowledge is developed sufficiently enough?

Nyanamoli: Dispassion is the sign, dispassion is the result.

Thaniyo: Then is one always aware of the background?

Nyanamoli: Sure, because that's not something you attend to.

Thaniyo: But then one is always aware of the background.

Nyanamoli: Yes, whatever that background is at the time. Hence, the arahant is always mindful.

Thaniyo: It doesn't have to be a specific background.

Nyanamoli: No, for as long as people think mindfulness is what you attend to, then they can't comprehend how an arahant can always be mindful and not be a robot at the same time. There is always something enduring, for as long as these aggregates don't break apart. That's what the Buddha meant when he said: "Or he develops mindfulness to the extent necessary for final knowledge." Exactly, to the extent. all the things that were implied in the perception of the beating heart, that's not in your control—yet it determines your whole life simultaneously while you're alive—you can go further within the same perception: What is the characteristic? What are the nimittas of that significance of my beating heart? It's not in my control. So, my sense of control fundamentally depends upon the greater domain of non-control, of that which is inaccessible to my control. That's nothing other than anicca. So, you develop the

perception of impermanence correctly. This thing cannot be owned, cannot be appropriated, cannot be control ed, it's impermanent.

Thaniyo: Everything that is experienced?

Nyanamoli: Yes, the universal characteristics are the most universal. But as I said, sometimes the mind just won't be getting established upon it because it's too subtle and it got too distracted or whatever, so you bring it down. That's why the Buddha had such a varied range of different approaches. Looking at a dead corpse for example. On some days that will not be necessary because it will be enough just to think about the phenomenon of non-control and it will be fully establishing dispassion, renunciation, relinquishing, and everything else. But on other days it might be necessary. Either way, you're developing the same principle.

Thaniyo: So, to know that you're developing correctly—when you've actually got somewhere in development— is the sign of dispassion always there?

Nyanamoli: If the mind is properly established… Why? Because again you have shifted the emphasis from me and I, onto the enduring phenomenon that exists on its own. So even when disagreeable things arise, it becomes inconceivable to become involved in a personal manner. It's just like knowing: "The wind blows, the branches fall, the sun shines, the heart beats, people shout abuse at you." It's on the same level. That's why the Buddha listed these as elements to be endured—enduring the malicious speech, the hurtful speech and so on.

Thaniyo: So, with the breath, breathing is always there—intention to breathe, to be more specific. But I can sit now and play with my breath.

Nyanamoli: OK. But you want to know it. Like now, for most people, because they're so concerned with what they attend to, even the people who try to practice, breath is pretty much peripheral in regard to their other actions. The breath goes into the background.

But if you bring the breath into the foreground, as in if you think "I'm sitting here, breathing in, breathing out…", you don't do it in the sense of thinking you are going to be attending to this every second. You bring it to the foreground so that you will see the background of breathing. For most day-to-day experience, breath is in the background. And here you can establish significance by asking yourself if you will be alive if the breathing stops? If your airways get blocked? No. So, you could establish the same principle as we just did—of dispassion, relinquishment, non-control, not-self—by seeing the background of your breath. Or you can think: "Why don't I refine it further and start seeing the background of the actual act of breathing?" And that's how the Ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118) goes where it says: "Knowingly he breathes in, knowingly he breathes out." And you see, actually it is not like: "I'm breathing in, I'm breathing in, I'm breathing in" while inhaling and then, "now I'm breathing out, breathing out, breathing out" while exhaling. That is not how it is said there! But rather, he's breathing in, breathing out, and he knows it, which means now he's discerning an even more general background to that, because that's what's in front of him. He puts his mindfulness to the fore, as the sutta says. No matter what he thinks, what

matters is knowing the background of that doing. That's how you establish mindfulness of breathing. Mindfulness is basically synonymous with background, so when you say mindfulness, you say background. You can cal mindfulness of breathing as the background of breathing.

Thaniyo: What is that background of breathing?

Nyanamoli: Well, fundamentally it comes down to the knowledge of action, any action, because breathing is an action; that would be if you fully discerned it. But initially what it will be as the background of breathing is the knowledge of breathing and of the necessity of breath, the necessity of the body.

When I say the necessity of those things it means you are not necessary, these things are necessary. It's like narrowing down the field of your concern. Don't get distracted by "I must do this and that". That's why the Buddha said: "When you develop this, that body you're discerning there is that body, the body among the bodies," which means it's the body that stands for the phenomenon of the body at the time. So, you use your breathing as a natural confinement for the concern of your thought, and you become mindful of it properly when you start discerning the background of that confinement. But, as I said, you discern the confinement because breathing is already there, whether you attend to it or not—you certainly don't make a mechanical method out of it, thinking: "I'll watch my nostrils… watch my nostrils…". There you don't discern a background, but you're actively looking away from it, while you're actively trying to focus on what's in front of you.

Thaniyo: So, what about this example of when you learn something like 2 + 2 equals 4. You know that now, so every time you look at 2 + 2—

Nyanamoli: The knowledge is there. Imagine the same principle applied to the universal nature of experience. Whenever you look at anything that has arisen, you see its cessation. That's the insight of the sotapanna: "Whatever has the nature of arising…". It doesn't say "whatever has arisen in front of me is impermanent." "Whatever has the nature of arising" means it's already a peripheral knowledge. The nature of a thing is something you cannot attend to. You can discern it based on things you're attending to. So, you discern that whatever has the nature of arising, for that reason has to cease.

Thaniyo: What is the sign of "arisen"?

Nyanamoli: Cessation. Because of its arising, not because it's going to disappear, but because it has arisen. So, whenever things arise for you, which is for as long as the five aggregates exist, you see impermanence.

That's why arahantship is irreversible, Right View is irreversible. You cannot forget that, because everything contains it. That's why it's such a general statement—because that's the most accurate way you could say it. "Whatever has the nature of arising, has the nature of ceasing." That's it.

Thaniyo: So that significance, that sign, is always there because whatever is manifested is always there.

Nyanamoli: Exactly, that is its nature. That's why the dhammā are the phenomena, and then the Dhamma, as in the Teaching,

is the nature of the phenomena. The phenomenology, literally—the knowledge of the phenomena. So, whatever has the nature of manifestation, has the nature of this teaching of the Dhamma, the nature of impermanence and so on.

In practice, you look at the breath, you contemplate the body so as to keep discerning this nature of manifestation clearer and clearer. It's already there on its own, manifested. You're not creating it by attending to it, you can only attend to it because it's already there enduring. You cannot create anything from nothingness and bring it into being because you are the result of it. Your attention is already secondary to it, structurally, not in the sense of a sequence like 1, 2, 3. It's all within the same arisen basis of the present form, paired with consciousness that you cannot step outside of. Any movement you make within it, is strictly within it. If you try to attend to that, it would require you to step outside of it and see it as an object, but that's inconceivable. And if you keep doing it, it's because you're misconceiving that you can do it. You want to discern these universal characteristics of things, not by your attending to them and thinking they exist only when you attend to them. And that's how you uproot your sense of self. You can't step outside of yourself or the five aggregates, but you can certainly stop misconceiving them, and that can be done only from the inside.

On sensuality

Thaniyo: There is a Sutta from AN 4:181: "How is a bhikkhu a long-distance shooter? Any kind of form whatsoever, past, future, present, whatever—a bhikkhu sees all form as it really is with correct wisdom."

Nyanamoli: Yes, so shooting the peripheral discernment. For example, within the significance of the heart you can discern even further: what is a more refined significance than this beating heart already implied, which is the significance of earth, water, re, air. Significance of impermanence, non-control. So, if a bhikkhu is a long-distance shooter, it means he doesn't even have to go through, for example, establishing the significance of the heart to discern these other more refined signifcances—his mind is already developed to the level of discerning refined significances in whatever has arisen. And these refined significances—refined signs—are the impermanence, four great elements, etc.

Thaniyo: The Sutta goes further: "And how is a bhikkhu a sharpshooter?"

Nyanamoli: He goes for the significances that are fundamental to freedom from suffering basically.

You would arrive at that through contemplating the independence of the four great elements, your dependence on it, etc. You would eventually drain away any conceit, any misconceiving, which will result in freedom from suffering. Or if you shoot precisely, you go straight for freedom from suffering, because that's already implied.

Thaniyo: Because that's like the most general recognition. Whatever has arisen, will cease, and you develop that.

Nyanamoli: That's also what it means to be paññavimutti. One who's liberated through wisdom because he discerns only things relevant to liberation. He doesn't develop all the jhānas

and everything else, but discerns the right things to the sufficient extent.

Like now when you speak about it, it will be quite an abstract thing. But the only reason it's abstract is because the mind hasn't been developed in regard to that abstraction, so start developing it. Start discerning it in arisen things that endure for you, in front of you, throughout your daily life—because these things are there. They will remain abstract for as long as you don't see them as they are—so you abstract them, literally.

Thaniyo: And then the Sutta goes further: "And how is a bhikkhu one who splits a great body? Here, a bhikkhu splits the great mass of ignorance. Possessing these four qualities he's worthy of offerings. And how is a bhikkhu skilled in places? He's virtuous, seeing the danger in the slightest fault…"

Nyanamoli: That's also where you see the danger—it's in that peripheral. The danger is in the background—the danger is the implication of what's in front of you. The danger is the context that you create. A puthujjana doesn't see the danger in sensuality, but if he starts thinking about it, discerning it, he'll get to see it because it is actually dangerous. That's how you can see the danger in the slightest fault, and not become neurotically obsessed about every little thing that's in front of you, fearing it—because that's not where the danger is. That's like the simile of the beautiful, tasty beverage: you can't see the poison in it, but you know it is there—which means ultimately the danger of sensuality is rooted in the background, and can never come in front of you and be seen in the same manner as you see an object of your senses.

That's why people are intoxicated with sensuality, despite the experience always proving that it's actually painful—you only regard things as real if they're the things that you can see through your senses, usually. So, you want to discern it. And that danger, as I said, never leaves the peripheral, never becomes something you can see with your eyes. You still see the beautiful object, but now you have fully understood and fully discerned the danger.

You have to know that poison is there, and you have to stop ignoring the fact that poison is there—and then you get to see that whatever is beautiful, you fully understood it as being dangerous, that 'this will kill me'. But you can't see the poison and you can't extract it and then say, "look, this is the poison! See?". Because that would then imply that other things you can see don't have that poison. Poison is actually in everything you see, hear, smell, taste, touch. Everything that's agreeable contains that poison because it's agreeable. You could think that the agreeability of things is what poison is. But that in itself is not dangerous, is it? What's dangerous is you carelessly ingesting the poison. You carelessly welcoming the agreeability, delighting in it, saying 'yes' to it.

Thaniyo: So, the danger is not the result.

Nyanamoli: No, exactly. The danger is that significance of it. If you take it, then danger befalls you.

Thaniyo: We'd usually think that danger of sensuality comes only if you overindulge.

Nyanamoli: No, no, no, that's basically on the level of perception. I suppose someone who's completely unrestrained

has to start rounding it up in such a crude manner.

Such kind of reflections that a complete assutava puthujjana will have to go through in order to begin, but that's not the danger. That's why the Buddha would say you're not free from sensuality until the danger becomes apparent. And the danger does not become apparent if, for you, to even get a sense of danger, you need to go through the motions of repeating how dissatisfying sensuality actually is, and so on—that's on the level of rationalizing.

It can help somebody who has absolutely no ground for practice, but you want to go way beyond that—you want to be able to get to the point where seeing the agreeable equals knowing the danger. That's why the Buddha said knowledge is secondary to perception, but you can equally have perception without knowledge being present there. So, knowledge is not in perception, which means you can't perceive the knowledge, but you can know that which you perceive at the same time.

In the case of a cup or drink in front of you—you're drinking it and it's very good; people told you it's healthy. People told you it's going to prolong your life and cure cancer, and it's amazing. But then somebody comes and tel s you that it's actually going to kill you, going to shorten your life. See, both could be right, meaning you don't know which one is right; but the fact that it's been placed in doubt that it's good for you is actually enough for you to back o from it. You think that it is better not to take any chances. Perhaps you don't need a longer life, because it might even actually shorten it. Let alone if it actually becomes apparent that the second guy was right and it will kill you

quicker, it will ruin you. But that which is in front of you hasn't changed—your experience of it is still the same.

Thaniyo: So, it might harm you.

Nyanamoli: The fact that you don't know for yourself whether it's good for you—that's already dangerous. And if you start thinking like that, the danger will become apparent—the danger that is actually there—but you can't see that until you arrive at it, which means you can't know that for yourself.

You have to take it on trust that sensuality is dangerous, and start regarding it as such and, because it is dangerous, your way of regarding it will eventually mirror how it is and you'll get to understand it.

And now, the peripheral of that perception of sensuality is the knowledge of the danger. It's the significance of the danger, it's the implication of the danger.

Thaniyo: But if you don't have the knowledge of the danger, what are you looking for?

Nyanamoli: Well, first if you don't discern the phenomenon of sensuality, you're not going discern the background of the danger. In the same sense mindfulness of breathing is like a confinement that represents all the other actions you do in your life on account of your breathing, but then you're not doing that confinement. You want to discern the background of that confinement. Then that makes everything inferior to that even clearer. So, in the same sense, you want to discern the extent of sensuality in order to discern the background of the danger. That's why the Buddha would always start by saying: "The

gratification of sensuality has been understood, the danger has become apparent." He wouldn't say that the danger has become apparent, and then he understood. But by understanding the extent of sensuality, by understanding its gratification, then the background of that, the danger, becomes clear. But not before you understand the extent of physical pleasures, craving for physical pleasures. And you can only understand the extent if you start looking for it. And the gratification of sensuality is not in the particular engagement of this sensuality, it's in the background of your particular engagement.

There are obviously kinds of sensuality that you cannot be mindful of—the ones that take the mind too far out, such as non-celibacy, killing, lying, stealing. You abandon that; but now you have to eat. Within that, you're going to get pleasant tastes in your mouth. And then you might think: "Oh, I must spit this out because it's too pleasant." In that case you don't see the gratification: you fear everything, you're spitting out the object, but that's not what sensuality is. Sensuality is your attitude in regard to the object you're attending to. If all you do is attend to things, you're never going to see your attitude in regard to it. Now that you live restrained, you're not breaking vinaya rules, you see the danger in the slightest fault. Then when you encounter agreeable things that are a basis for sensuality, that's when you start looking for the background to it. You all ow it to arise while the taste is in your mouth. The Buddha didn't say "spit out the food!" But he said we should eat mindfully, meaning eat while you're aware of the background of your pleasant taste. Don't get absorbed in the pleasant taste. And try to not get absorbed by the pleasant taste by focusing on other things, or twisting their tongue to avoid the taste and whatnot. No, that's equally on the same footing as where the taste is. You

want to just know the background of the pleasant taste—that's already clarifying the extent of gratification. The clearer the extent of the perception of gratification becomes, the clearer the significance of the danger. Hence, the gratification became clear, the danger has been seen, has become apparent, and then the way out from sensuality and gratification is automatic.

So, first, you have to be restrained, not giving in to distraction. If you intentionally give in to sensuality, you can't establish that mindfulness, because your intention has already distorted it—it's already inverted, perverted. But if agreeable things that are a base for sensuality come to you, without your intention necessarily being rooted in seeking the pleasure in them, that's where you start discerning the peripheral, that's where the gratification of sensuality becomes clearer. That's why sila has to come first, it's just not optional. But the problem is when people see that sila comes first and then believe that after it comes the denial of anything pleasant, even if it's not sought by you; that becomes the next attitude. They think: "This taste is way too nice, so I only eat things that I hate." But you're basically misconceiving sensuality. You think sensuality is in the actual taste, and you think that by avoiding taste, you avoid sensuality. No, you just obscure it further.

Thaniyo: If you were free from sensuality, you would be what?

Nyanamoli: You'd be an anagami. If you don't have the right view, you could be free from sensuality and then you would need very, very little instruction to get the right view because you've already done 80% of the work: 80% of the fundamental existential distractions which are the senses. That would have been tamed and surmounted and understood.

Thaniyo: Because if you see things, knowing that whatever has arisen, the background is “it will cease,” and then you turn your mind to what is the extent of sensuality…

Nyanamoli: Exactly, you see the same principle. And also those who don’t see that principle, but have seen the sensuality, they have removed pretty much the sole reason for not seeing impermanence.

Virtually, sensuality is the main reason because it results in distraction and everything else. So, you have removed that, you have understood that, you’ve developed your mind in regard to it. You have seen the peripheral of that domain, you’ve seen the danger in it, and then you just need somebody to tell you what the impermanence of phenomena is, and you would immediately go straight to anagami, or even arahant because you’ve already done all the work.

Thaniyo: So, you’re saying that the danger of sensuality is being pul ed in the foreground.

Nyanamoli: Yes. See, all that is accurate, but you want to see that not as a statement that you made, but actually see it coming from that sensuality. But in order to see it, you have to be clarifying that understanding, even those statements, for yourself. The more you clarify it, the more of the significance is being clarified. And then you will get to recognize it. But the fundamental danger in sensuality is exactly that: you cannot remain not pulled, not distorted by the foreground. You cannot.

You’re only free when you surmount the danger. You’re only free when you surmount ignorance. So, if you don’t surmount

it, you're not free. And that's the danger of saṃsāra. Not free means saṃsāra.

Thaniyo: Am I not then seeing the danger in sensuality, if I see that?

Nyanamoli: Well , you're seeing it to some extent, sure, but you want to see that to the point where any desire toward it has faded away—towards sensual enjoyment—, and it will fade away when the perception of danger—that background implication, significance of danger—is developed to the extent necessary, whereby no matter how much you get distracted, you'll never, ever go back to the point of being so distracted that you actually want sensuality.

In the same sense of when you vomit food that you ate, you'll never ever get so hungry to eat that stuff that's mouldy and filthy and mixed with soil. It's just not perceived as edible anymore. That's how far you want to go. Where sensuality has ceased to be perceived as worthy of engagement, where it's actually the opposite. Non-engagement is what's worthy, non-engagement is what freedom is for you. Engagement is death for you, results in death, implies death. It makes you liable to death. Literally, you wouldn't be killed if somebody comes and shoots you in the head. That's not death. Death is sending your mind back down to the senses. That's how you get killed. Because if you take your mind away from the senses—you surmount sensuality—even if somebody comes and shoots you in the head, you are not killed. So that's why the Buddha said that those who are not mindful—those who are not properly established upon the peripheral background discernment of that significance—they're as if already dead.

Thaniyo: Because if you see the extent of sensuality, then you know very well when you step into it.

Nyanamoli: Yes, it cannot be done accidentally. It's always a choice. If you're aware of the background, you're aware of being about to make a choice. You're aware of the possibilities to choose, which means you realize you're already responsible; you're already choosing the direction of sensuality even before you directly engage with it.

Thaniyo: So, basically seeing the choice of sensuality is also seeing the extent of sensuality.

Nyanamoli: Sure. Seeing the extent of sensuality, seeing the background of sensuality. Discerning gradually the significance of it. Taking responsibility for the choice. That's another approach to the same thing.

51hh- Guided Contemplation - At The Old Guards Cave

Meditation/*Bhāvanā*, the mental development that the Buddha taught, is about the cultivation of understanding or wisdom. A practitioner, therefore, should not be looking for some kind of special novelty experience, but instead should be looking for clarity in terms of understanding, which if done rightly, will result in freedom from suffering and peace.

It doesn't matter if you meditate for 10-15 minutes or a dedicated five hours a day. What matters is that that time is spent towards establishing the mind in clarity in regard to the nature of experience, i.e developing wisdom. That's also why instruction is necessary. If you don't know what to look for, if you don't know what to discern, you won't find it by yourself. Even as far as a 'guided meditation' goes, it should be guiding you towards understanding.

Let's say that a person wants to settle their mind, without falling into some kind of mystical absorption, and without over rationalising either, the first thing that needs to be done is physical solitude, being physically removed from other people. Far enough to not hear them, far enough to not see them, far enough to not feel that you can be encroached upon by them at any given time. Secluded and remote. Once you are secluded and remote, ask yourself, "What is the goal of the practice? What is my specific purpose? What am I trying to achieve? Am I after happiness? Am I after peace? Am I after freedom from suffering?" Whatever the answer may be, it should be made clear that the experience of peace or happiness, etc, will not be

given to you. That experience needs to be cultivated and you can only develop that peace, freedom from suffering, happiness and wisdom by knowing how you're supposed to develop it. That is why the Buddha said, a person should go and visit those who are wise. Then reflect upon what he has heard and measure the task.

> **"Bhikkhus, I do not say that final knowledge is achieved all at once. On the contrary, final knowledge is achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress.**
>
> **"And how is final knowledge achieved by gradual training, gradual practice, gradual progress? Here one who has faith in a teacher visits him; when he visits him, he pays respect to him; when he pays respect to him, he gives ear; one who gives ear hears the Dhamma; having heard the Dhamma, he memorises it; he examines the meaning of the teachings he has memorised; when he examines their meaning, he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings; when he has gained a reflective acceptance of those teachings, zeal springs up in him; when zeal has sprung up, he applies his will; having applied his will, he scrutinises; having scrutinised, he strives; resolutely striving, he realises with the body the supreme truth and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom."**
>
> – MN 70

All the tools for freedom from suffering are already contained within your experiences as a whole, within the five aggregates.

As the Buddha said, the reason for suffering is craving, and the reason for freedom from suffering is the extinguishing of craving. Craving is not to be found elsewhere. It's not in things you crave for. It's not in things you're attached to. It's not in things that you find dear and pleasing. It's not in the world. It's not in the object of your senses. It's not in the object of your attention. It's in your attitude towards things that you can attend, perceive and engage with. If you were to remove that craving, gradually, if you were to stop feeding it, if you were to allow it to fade away through non-maintenance. Then the result is freedom from suffering within this very present experience as a whole. Right now.

That non-maintenance is developed and discerned when you realise that you can't maintain it, even if you want to, when you realise that the very foundation of your own life is not in your own control, you have no say in it, your life is secondary to it, your choices that you've been making are secondary to it. And that's nothing other than impermanence that the Buddha was talking about.

Once you have gone to a secluded place, away from people, it will take some time for the mind to settle into that solitude. Whenever that is, without overdoing it, without over attending it, try to start regarding yourself as part of that non-inhabited setup, for example, being a part of that remote forest, cave, root of the tree, the empty hut, wherever you might be. There are trees, there are rocks, there are rivers, there are waterfalls, there is this body there as well. There are monkeys, there are birds, there are snakes, there is this body there as well. You are not separate from it. There is this cave here, the huge tree trunks, broken trees, broken rocks, mountains and so on. Your

body is actually ‘closer’ to those things than to your point of view. Your body belongs to these rocks and trees and forests, mountains and so on ‘belongs’ as in, it is made of the same elements. The whole ‘your’ of ‘your body’, is completely gratuitous. The only reason you can regard your body as yours is because there is something to be regarded as mine. And that something precedes your ownership, and that’s what you’re either reminding yourself of or discerning for the first time, doesn’t matter. The solitary setup, free from people, free from disturbances where you are alone, you start to see that your own point of view is incidental in the grand scheme of things, the grand scheme of things of the entire four great elements, the mountains, the forests that you are in. Your body shares that nature, your body is the same. Which means as huge as these rocks are, you can see that even they break down, split and crumble. What then is to be said about this human body which is quite soft in comparison. If the granite mountains cannot escape the gradual destruction what is to be said about this very soft body.

Such a thought is not for the purpose of some kind of poetic indulgence. No, these reflections are about undermining your very own sense of existence, which is your very own sense of control, mastery and ownership. And it’s not necessarily going to be pleasant, especially not if it’s discerned for the first time. These things are frightening for those who still want to hold on to their appropriated point of view, as the owner of the body and so on. That’s why you have to ‘learn’ how to find peace in it. It’s not really an option. Fear is optional. You don’t have to fear it. But you will automatically fear it. If it contradicts your point of view of ownership, which you’re refusing to let go of. You have to gradually undermine your own sense of ownership

whereby, even the fear cannot be owned. But you do have to accept it first.

> **“What, friends, is the earth element? The earth element may be either internal or external. What is the internal earth element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and appropriated; that is, head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and appropriated: this is called the internal earth element. Now both the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the earth element.**
>
> **“Now there comes a time when the water element is disturbed and then the external earth element vanishes. When even this external earth element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is appropriated by craving and lasts but a while? There can be no consideration of that as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am.’”**

– MN 28

So this very body, six feet tall, surrounded by wilderness, belongs to the wilderness, that belongs to the great planet earth, that belongs to a complete set of its own laws and circumstances and accidents, and change of elements and so on. Which means not even a tiny grain of this human body can be mine or can obey me. The beating heart, the muscle that pumps the blood completely involuntarily, is like these rivers flowing here, the trees growing and so on, but if something little changes, those great things will be gone. What is to say, for a little inferior, tiny muscle in your chest, that pumps blood that keeps you alive. Or your lungs being able to breathe, the movement of the wind in this forest, the movement of the wind on the mountain, the movement of the wind within this body.

That's why the Buddha would talk about these things in the suttas, because you are to reflect on it so that you actually 'feel' that 'not in control'. That's why virtue needs to be established beforehand, you must have been living restrained and keeping the precepts, because if you start undermining your own sense of self, your own point of view, which is all about control and mastery, well, you start undermining your sanity, very often, not always, but very often because that fear can overwhelm a person. However, it can't overwhelm you, if your behaviour has been purified beforehand.

By dwelling in the solitary environment, free from others, you actually get to see that whatever personality, whatever sense of self you have created in the course of this life, it's fully dependent upon this living operating organs of this body, that are on the level of trees, rocks, rivers, mountains, and so on.

And when those things come to cease, these organs will also come to cease, they cannot possibly remain standing. So it's not a question of looking for a great epiphany or some great revelation of the hidden truth, it's a question of clarifying this very image, this very reflection, maintaining it and letting it endure, letting it exist peripherally (at the back of your mind so to speak) while you are doing other things. Establish your mind in it, because you're basically establishing your mind in non-appropriation, you're establishing your mind in the impossibility of appropriation.

> **"Suppose, bhikkhus, people were to carry off the grass, sticks, branches, and foliage in this Jeta's Grove, or to burn them, or to do with them as they wish. Would you think: 'People are carrying us off, or burning us, or doing with us as they wish'?"**
>
> **"No, venerable sir. For what reason? Because, venerable sir, that is neither our self nor what belongs to our self."**
>
> **"So too, bhikkhus, form is not yours, feeling…,perception…,intentions…,consciousness is not yours: abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness."**
>
> – SN 22.33

If you are in a forest, take a look at all the twigs and branches there, you don't think twice about them. If somebody were to ask, "Is this yours? Does this belong to you?" The answer is "No, of course not." But if somebody were to ask you about your own body, you'd say, "Well, it is my body", or you might stop and

think about it, "…but it isn't mine, in the same manner, these objects around me aren't mine in this wilderness." This circumstantial forest, your body, shares the same nature. None of this is yours and therefore that body cannot be yours because if it were yours, you would be in charge of your own heart, the way it beats, you could tell it to stop, you would be in charge of your own metabolism, your own lungs, brain, and so on. But you aren't. Any notion of control intentionality and choice that comes through it is secondary, it's fully within the container of this given body. Which means when that given body ceases to be given to you, all the things that you do on account of it will not be able to stand anymore.

Seclusion, in order to stop identifying yourself, with people, with external sense of control with external sense of management, but instead, as a stepping back into something greater, something more accidental, something that cannot be conceived to be controlled. Such as wilderness, and then maintaining that image, that meaning. Not expecting a great bolt of lightning, giving you every answer to every single question. No, just maintaining that very setup, because that very setup will be puncturing the bubble of craving, and it will slowly bleed away. That's what I meant by non maintenance of it, you can't stop maintaining it overnight. But you set up an environment that prevents it, that cannot give rise to maintenance of craving of one's own appropriation. And that's how craving bleeds out, fades away, then even if you're with people afterwards, there will not be the re-induction of your own ignorance and your own appropriation.

These giant roots, massive rocks, huge banyan trees, great mountains, large rivers. All that is accidental, circumstantial.

What is to be said about the blood flowing in this body, the heart pumping and the lungs breathing. Even the small trees and branches are more durable than this body, yet somehow this body is regarded as mine, as if it is in my control. It's not about denying your sense of control, it's about undermining it while it is still present, by seeing it as gratuitous.

There is me, there is this sense of I am, but you want to undermine it, by seeing it fully determined by that which cannot be yours. That's how your own sense of control ceases to be yours. That's how an arahant can still act, talk, choose, prefer, without actually owning anything, because he has fully surpassed and surmounted it. The only reason people appropriate things is because they don't fully understand that they cannot do so. I mean, I can say, "yes, this mountain is mine", but it's completely meaningless. It's even meaningless to me. I know it's meaningless, and there is no amount of self induced conviction that will make me believe "No, it is mine". It cannot be mine. I can say that "This planet earth is mine". Sure, but that statement is hollow, and it's not more hollow than saying that this body is mine. It isn't. It's absolutely on the same footing as the element of earth. And if that is discerned, then it will be equally meaningless for you to think that this body, this heart, these lungs, these senses are mine. And then there will be no problem left for you to deal with, because you have surmounted, let go of, extinguished the basis of all problems. You don't go around dealing with every single problem individually. You just uproot the necessary basis for all problems.

54hh- Not Wanting the Wanting

Wanting sense objects that you derive pleasure from, that is sensuality, it's that wanting. So, in order to abandon sensuality, you have to stop being concerned with the objects that you want and start developing 'not wanting' of that wanting of the sense objects. Of course, restraint needs to be done first and then, on the basis of that, you can start discerning the nature of wanting anything sensual.

As long as you remain focussed on the objects that you want, you are then failing to see the root of sensuality, but consequently, if you develop 'not wanting' in regard to that wanting of sense objects, that's how you overcome the sense objects. You lose concern with them because you uprooted them, through developing 'not wanting' of their wanting.

Sensuality is the wanting of sensual objects, welcoming, entertaining, delighting in them. That would be your wanting and accepting of that wanting of sense objects at face value. A skilled monk, a person who practises correctly, will then first be restrained and then start seeing that it's the wanting that's the problem.

Through not welcoming, entertaining or delighting in the wanting of sensual objects, you surmount the whole domain of sensuality.

That's what I mean when I say develop the 'not wanting' of sensual objects, that's what 'don't delight' means. A person who doesn't see this will either be concerned with sensual objects, denying them, saying it's impermanent or ugly, basically

misapplying his effort towards sense objects, or failing to see that they are rooted in 'being wanted' that is the problem. But then equally he will then try to override that initial wanting of sensual objects, try to get rid of it, try to prevent it from arising, but you can't do that because the arising is not in you.

As the Buddha said, "the eye wants to see pleasant sights etc" – that's just the structure of your experience. That's how the five senses operate, that's why the Buddha referred to them as five feeding grounds. So, trying to interfere with that wanting of sense objects is also taking it up.

Not delighting does not mean that you deny that first arising, it means you see it as a whole, or you see that there are the sense objects that are being wanted by the senses and that's what you don't delight in. If wanting of sensuality has arisen, it's going to persist on its own as an arisen dhamma, as an arisen phenomena for as long as it persists. Your only concern is to not delight in it for any time during its duration.

If somebody arrives in front of your door and wants to come in, the only way for them to enter is if you welcome them in. So in the beginning you might feel awkward, pressured and nervous because the person is in front of your door and you either go out to welcome him in out of weakness etc, but then you realize that you can't let him in – he can stand there for hundreds of years if he wants, that's not your concern. Your concern is to not welcome him inside. If you start practising like that, things will go away of their own accord. The Mara's daughters, they are going to try and harass you for as long as they perceive a way in, a possibility of being allowed to come inside. When they tried with the Buddha, after his enlightenment, they could not

get in because he had been practising for years. For a person who hasn't been practising, it's then enough for someone to come and stand at the door and that person will cave in and start engaging with them, because of the uncomfortable pressure.

All one has to do is keep the door closed, not try to chase anyone away because that would be engaging with them. Affirming or denying, either way, you are engaged with things. So, the only way to not engage is to allow a thing to arise, whichever way it arises and then not welcome it. Don't open the door, and if you do that to the extent necessary, with the passage of time, it will stop coming.

As some suttas say "you establish your mind in the imperturbable in regard to sensuality". It doesn't matter what arises, one is not concerned with the content, you just maintain the attitude of not wanting the arisen wanting of these sense objects. If you do that long enough then the arising of the wanting of sense objects will change its significance. It's not going to be about sense objects anymore, it's going to be about "oh, this is that which is not welcomed or delighted in, this is that which is not wanted, this is that which used to be my sensuality". Even wanting the absence of those things is taking up the wanting. The significance changes while the objects remain the same and the whole domain remains the same. The eyes still have their feeding ground, but now you have conquered them, now they can't go feed like the wild animals used to do, you are now the one in control. So, the eye will get to eat only what the mind that doesn't want any of it allows, and whatever it allows, it won't be a sensual thing. Because that has been abandoned.

Sensuality requires taking that wanting for granted. That's why if you stop wanting the wanting of sense objects, you get to see the extent of the wanting in regard to the sense objects, you get to understand the gratification. By seeing that, you get to understand the danger of the wanting of sense objects. If you say 'yes' to the wanting of pleasant sights and then within the next 10 seconds you go blind, or those sights are ripped away from you, would you be affected? Of course you would, but if you never give in to the original wanting of those sights, would you then be affected? You wouldn't, because you never took on that wanting, you never welcomed it in. Like the simile of the mango tree…. (MN 54)

That directionality of wanting the sense objects is always directional, as in it's always going to take you one way or another, which means that you can't maintain the perspective of the domain – you have to commit to it and go with it, which means that you are not in control. It's all great when things are going the way you want, but it's inconceivable that that's how things will always be. Not just from the side of your own senses failing, but also the objects as well. Just ask yourself, which is more? The times I got what I wanted or the times I didn't, and you realise, of course, it's the times I didn't get what I wanted is more. So, whenever I got what I wanted, it was circumstantial, accidental – the bases of usually not getting what I wanted.

If you stop wanting any type of wanting of the sense objects, you cannot not get what you want, because you only want one thing – non-sensuality and now that is implied in sensuality. Sensuality keeps reminding you of your freedom from sensuality. Sense objects keep reminding you of your imperturbable state.

One needs to understand what sensuality is, which is the wanting of the sense objects, not just the wanting or just the sense objects. It's the wanting of these pleasing sights etc, it's this pressure I experience on the level of my body, on the level of my senses.

So, you stop wanting the wanting, which means that you will also have to stop being concerned with the object of your sensuality, but start looking at the nature of sensuality which is 'it being wanted'. So, you don't want that which is being wanted in regard to the senses. What you will then get is unshakeable peace or freedom from suffering.

Sensuality is inherently unpleasant, it's dangerous, it's of very little gratification, it's not worth even making the effort for the gratification. It's like someone asking you for $1000 for a lottery ticket which has a maximum win of $5 – it's ridiculous. Why would you do that, yet that's what sensuality is. Even with the most refined type of sensuality, the utmost reward that you will get is always 100th of your investment. That's why the Buddha gave the simile of sensuality being like a meatless bone that a dog keeps chewing because it's just mad with it, he gets nothing in return. It's of little gratification not because you theoretically pondered over it and you mused how unsatisfactory it is – no, it's a fact, that's the deal you always get. All you need to do is not invest in sensuality and you will gain a thousand-fold. All you need is to practise renunciation to win.

All you need to do is not do sensuality and you win. That's the pleasure of jhāna – the pleasure of relief from the burden.

With sensuality, it's not just that you do not get any reward – you lose even more. By contrast, renunciation is loss and debt-

free.

You cannot understand the nature of sensuality correctly and still want it, the two are mutually exclusive. Understanding of it means not wanting it. People engage in sensuality because that's the only pleasure they know. That's not necessarily the problem, you use the same criteria, 'I want pleasure', the senses want pleasure. That's fine, but it's about what pleasure you pursue with this, that's the difference, and that's what the Buddha realized – that there is nothing unwholesome with the pleasure of jhāna or renunciation.

So, from the point of view of 'wanting the pleasure of the senses', you will get more pleasure through restraining than sensuality.

That's why sensuality and carelessness go hand-in-hand. You need to be careless and lose sight of the perspective in order to be pulled by sensuality and give in. But everybody starts by being careless and being sensual within the sensual domain. So, you start with restraint in order to develop the perspective of it – then you can say 'no' to the right things.

That's why sensuality is not wanted by anyone, and not discerning that, you habitually go with that arisen 'wanting of your senses'. You appropriate it and then you think that you want it. So, you don't deny the sense objects or the wanting of them, but you say 'no' to them and let them endure without giving in at any point of the duration. Then you realise the pain here, that the unpleasant aspect is the aspect of the sense of suffering on account of not getting the object, but neither of that is mine, and then eventually those senses will calm down. Like the taming of the wild animal 'simile… (SN 35:247)

If that's not working in someone's practice, they are probably denying 'the wanting of the sense objects', as in interfering with it, or are too concerned with denying the sense objects themselves. Which means they don't have the perspective of the nature of the sensual domain, but if they do, they realise that that domain has arisen on its own. Sensuality is there – eyes want to see etc., don't interfere with that. Don't be careless in regard to that.

Not wanting the wanting of sense objects needs to be universal, that attitude needs to be developed so you say "This is not just for today or tomorrow that I don't want this, this is for the rest of my life and future lives if that might happen". The wanting of the sense objects will never be wanted, will never be welcomed. It might arise countless times more for you, but every time it arises, it is not welcomed and you won't open the door until eventually it will have to go away. Either way, you will win, you will win by not being bothered, by not losing your investments stupidly, by not exposing yourself to risk and then, on top of that, by discerning the nature of the imperturbable, which is immeasurably more pleasurable in a wholesome sense. You can't even compare it to the pleasure of sensuality. They are two different domains, they are mutually exclusive. You can't have jhāna and have sensuality. Through discerning and abandoning the sensual domain, you develop the impenetrable in regard to that domain, that's the pleasure of jhānas. Welcoming the possibility of sensuality in the future will keep sensuality pressuring you. Reaching the state of freedom from sensuality depends on your power of conviction.

64hh- Responsibility Can Free You From Suffering

The reason why understanding is hard to develop, is because in order to do so, one needs to know what must be understood. That might sound self explanatory, but the point is, understanding takes repetition. One needs to make the effort of repetitive investigation or drilling into a certain topic or theme that needs to be clarified, i.e. the theme or aspect of experience that one wants to develop clarity in regard to. In order to do that, you need to know what to look for, you need to know how to approach it and what to understand. Getting information about it is absolutely necessary, but information in itself, as vast as it can be, is not 'understanding'. Which is something that many people would confuse; knowing a lot about something does not mean you understand it, especially when it comes down to the Nature of things, feelings, intentions, or the Nature of experience as a whole.

When it comes to practising the Dhamma, many people mystify it, as in, go after an experience of some kind of new amazing feeling which they can interpret as understanding/enlightenment, a kind of 'intuitive wisdom'. However, if you cannot explain an experience or make it intelligible to yourself or to somebody else, you should not think you understood it. Now, of course you're free to use your own words, so to speak, you don't have to use already given templates of descriptions and so on. But the point is, you will still be able to convey the meaning if you understood that experience in its *nature*, and that's the crucial factor here, the meaning of the experience, the meaning of whatever might

have happened to you that you think was somehow worthy in your practice, in your meditation or in any other area of life for that matter. And that's when you realise that most of the time, even things that you think you understand, upon which you act and choose to live your life, you haven't actually understood the meaning behind, you just act, you just go along with it, i.e. it made some vague sense to you, or as the Buddha said, you will be doing these things or holding those views, simply because it pleases you, simply because it "feels" good, and that's the sole criteria for most people. They find an idea pleasing and that's why they defend their view and their actions based on their chosen views. Either way, there is no understanding of those things. That's the important difference that we are trying to highlight here. Basically it's not about the experience that you might have, it's about understanding it. And if understanding is the focus, that's when you realise the content of the experience doesn't matter as much, as long as it's wholesome, as long as it's based on restraint and virtue, then you realise it's the understanding of any experience which results in freedom from suffering, that matters.

The reason why this practice, given by the Buddha, the practice of *understanding* is harder than just sitting and trying to develop calmness or pleasant feeling through some practice of concentration, is because it will result initially, in causing doubt and restlessness in your mind. But that's how you know that you are doing it properly. By working through these things, you learn to be imperturbable in the face of the thinking mind, not the other way round. You're afraid of the thinking mind because it disturbs you, and then you try to stop the thinking, you try to concentrate on a little point so you don't have to think about anything else. However, you need to develop

strength in the face of that which wants to move you, in order to be immovable, not control the content that disturbs you. So it's important to then obviously read the Suttas and get the idea as to what needs to be understood. But very often, it comes down to that tedious, ambiguous, heavy drilling of your thought.

Sit down in a quiet, non-crowded environment and ask yourself, "Intention, intention, what is intention? Do I know what intention is for me, for myself, in my own experience? When I say intention, what do I refer to? Is it understood? What is it? Whatever it is, do I try to understand it, or do I just sort of float on the surface of the meaning of intention? Is the meaning vague? How would I describe my intention?"

Try writing down what your intention is and then afterwards, read that back to yourself and see if it makes any sense. If it does, then push the questions further. So, in this case, you ask, "So what is intent? What is my intention? Like now, I have the intention to be seated here and contemplate the nature of intention? What is the intention that's making me do this? What is it? Is it a fleeting thought? Well, it isn't, because I'm still seated, trying to contemplate these things. Which means that that thought is present throughout these more particular actions that I'm doing, that I'm trying to contemplate. I remain seated, I still haven't switched on my phone, I still haven't opened my door to the world. So, all these other things I do are on the basis of a simultaneously present more general intention, which is to ponder on the nature of intention, or the nature of feeling or the nature of five aggregates ….". So how else would you then describe that presently enduring intention? Is it a thought? Is it some sort of perception? It is,

because if it weren't, you wouldn't be able to talk about it, you wouldn't be able to designate it even for yourself, let alone for others. So, it's a peripheral thought, which in this case, I have the intention to sit down and contemplate.

You don't have to keep it in front of your mind, as in, while you're sitting and contemplating. You don't have to keep saying to yourself, "I want to sit, I want to sit, I want to contemplate, that's my intention." No, because these actions already carry that intention. That's how intentions work. That's why I keep saying the most important thing for somebody who wants to start the practice or somebody who's already developing it, is to develop full transparency in regard to present enduring motivations behind the smallest of actions. That's how you get to discern the fundamental aspect of wholesome or unwholesome, good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, and especially to discern where your actions are rooted. Because if you're not aware of this peripheral thought of your intention that directs all of your particular actions, while it endures, you're not aware of where that action or those actions are rooted.

Intention is wholesome or unwholesome or neutral, but for practical sake, just look for wholesome and unwholesome, if it's unwholesome avoid it, if it's wholesome, don't try to deny it or fear it, just let it be, let it endure. Either way, they arise on their own, but your responsibility is not to try to prevent them from arising, your responsibility is to prevent yourself from acting out of it. So as I said, even if you're a beginner, sit down, quietly, in a semi-protected environment, undistracted, and question the things you're doing and things you want to do. Bring them forward to your mind, and then think about why you want to

act, “Oh, it’s because of this and that. Well, why is this and that a reason for me doing these things? Why did I choose that to be the reason?”.

It’s always on you, intention is always your responsibility. That’s why the Buddha said that every action is an intention. You can’t commit an action without having it rooted in an intention. And that’s what “beings are owners of their actions” means. Only you, nobody else, which means you are fundamentally always responsible for what you choose to do. That’s not negotiable or optional.

> **“Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Action is what differentiates beings in terms of baseness & excellence.”**
>
> – MN 135

Ask yourself, “What is the intention? When I say intention, intention? What am I referring to in this experience as a whole?”. We have established it’s a sort of ambiguous peripheral thought, an idea or context of all these little things that you are doing. You don’t have to keep staring at little things that you’re doing in order to discern intention. Why? Because the intention always comes first structurally, simultaneously the intentions and actions are present. But intention is deeper, so to speak, it’s not that you have the intention and then the actions. No, you have intentions and you have your environment in regard to which you have intentions. But that’s when you recognise that these intentions determine the course

of my action, and for that I'm responsible for saying yes or no to them.

So, we established that an intention in the most fundamental, most basic, the most straightforward description, is a thought, a right thought or a bad thought. You have a thought that gives the context to your present actions. But if you're unaware of that thought, it means you are unaware of the nature of it, whether the nature is wholesome or unwholesome. And if that is the case, that means you will not know whether your actions are rooted in good or bad. Through avoiding responsibility for your intentions, you end up avoiding responsibility for your actions down the line. That's why the five or eight precepts, i.e. virtue, always has to come first.

You have to start narrowing down your 'avoidance of responsibility'. Someone who doesn't keep the precepts, he avoids responsibility left and right and there is no base for Dhamma whatsoever. If you start keeping the precepts, that's where you create a basis for progress in Dhamma. You might avoid responsibility here and there, and until you invest enough work into that, and rectify that, at least you will not avoid responsibility past this point, past the five precepts or eight, and so on. You start rounding up that avoidance of responsibility for your actions, and that can then bring further clarity to the fact that your responsibility goes even beyond that, that you are responsible for welcoming the thought of greed, the thought of aversion, ill will, cruelty, and the thought of distraction. That's why the Buddha would say, the noble disciple, the one with the right view, who has developed clarity in regard to the nature of his intentions, all he has to do is not tolerate and not delight and not welcome the unwholesome

thoughts. All he has to do is not be ignorant and distract himself from wholesome thoughts.

So when unwholesome/unhealthy intentions arise, he's aware of it, he understands it, and all he needs to do is abstain from doing anything on account of it. He knows, "I will not welcome this and I will not entertain this thought to stay for even a second longer.". If that attitude is present, it will be impossible for him to act out of it. The only way you can act out of unwholesome intentions, is if you ignore that they are unwholesome because as soon as you're aware of their unwholesomeness, you cannot act, it's mutually exclusive. You must ignore the unwholesome in order to act out of it. And that's exactly why ignorance is the most blameworthy, it's a fundamental prerequisite for anything unwholesome.

> **"The Blessed One said this: Bhikkhus, before my awakening, while I was still only seeking awakening, it occurred to me: 'Suppose that I divide my thoughts into two classes. Then I set on one side thoughts of sensual desire, thoughts of ill will, and thoughts of cruelty, and I set on the other side thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of non-ill will, and thoughts of non-cruelty.**
>
> **"As I abided thus, diligent, ardent, and resolute, a thought of sensual desire (*and a thought of either ill-will or cruelty*) arose in me. I understood thus: 'This thought of sensual desire has arisen in me. This leads to my own affliction, to others' affliction, and to the affliction of both; it obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties, and leads away from Nibbāna.' - When I**

considered: ‘This leads to my own affliction,’ it subsided in me; when I considered: ‘This leads to others’ affliction,’ it subsided in me; when I considered: ‘This leads to the affliction of both,’ it subsided in me; when I considered: ‘This obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties, and leads away from Nibbāna,’ it subsided in me. Whenever a thought of sensual desire arose in me, I abandoned it, removed it, and did away with it.

…

“Bhikkhus, whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of sensual desire, he has abandoned the thought of renunciation to cultivate the thought of sensual desire, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of sensual desire. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of ill will…upon thoughts of cruelty, he has abandoned the thought of non-cruelty to cultivate the thought of cruelty, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of cruelty.

“Just as in the last month of the rainy season, in the autumn, when the crops thicken, a cowherd would guard his cows by constantly tapping and poking them on this side and that with a stick to check and curb them. Why is that? Because he sees that he could be flogged, imprisoned, fined, or blamed if he let them stray into the crops. So too I understood, in unwholesome states there is danger, degradation,

and defilement, and in wholesome states the blessing of renunciation, the aspect of cleansing.

"As I abided thus, diligent, ardent, and resolute, a thought of renunciation arose in me. I understood thus: 'This thought of renunciation has arisen in me. This does not lead to my own affliction, or to others' affliction, or to the affliction of both; it aids wisdom, does not cause difficulties, and leads to Nibbāna. If I think and ponder upon this thought even for a night, even for a day, even for a night and day, I see nothing to fear from it. But with excessive thinking and pondering I might tire my body, and when the body is tired, the mind becomes strained, and when the mind is strained, it is far from composure.' So I steadied, stilled, unified and composed my mind internally. Why is that? So that my mind should not be strained…"

– MN 19

Avijja-Ignorance it's not some sort of metaphysical and mysterious cloud of unknowing that deludes you, it's this very act of ignoring your responsibility, avoiding transparency, avoiding the recognition of your choice in regards to the present intention. That's ignorance and that's how you carry it, you perpetuate it through your own actions. Ignorant actions perpetuate ignorance because of which actions are ignorant. It's a vicious circle, but you can break through it if you start accepting that responsibility, if you start looking at the motivation behind your action, and develop clarity in regard to its nature.

As I said, ask yourself, “What is the nature of intention? When I say intention what do I refer to? Do I refer to a specific or general thought, to a mood, a feeling, what is it?” The main problem is not necessarily not being able to give an answer right away. The main problem is not even attempting to think about it in the first place, which is what most people do because initially it’s so ambiguous. It’s going to take a lot of effort because we are used to just being focused on the content/positive aspect as opposed to the negative,i.e. the background context. So now you have to be discerning the *nature* in regard to the present content. That’s why this kind of thinking requires constant drilling/repetition, and the prerequisites of virtue and sense restraint in order for understanding to take root. Otherwise, it just won’t happen, you will just be floating from one content to another.

You can pick up any theme, like the aggregate of feeling, for example, and ask yourself: “What do I feel right now? What is the nature of the feeling? How would I describe it? Is it an idea? If I say, “Oh, I feel light, heavy, etc,” are those feelings or are those perceptions of lightness and so on? Feelings, as the suttas say, are pleasant, unpleasant, or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant. So all these perceptions I’m talking about, I feel light, I feel heavy, I feel this, I feel like that, etc. Where are they rooted, presently? Is it pleasant, unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant?…” .That’s how you start clarifying the feeling. You realise that most often, things we think feelings are, are actually perceptions, thoughts and concepts. And you will be talking about those things as your feelings, for as long as you don’t make the effort to think about what the actual feeling is.

You can see that the practice of Right understanding, the practice of developing the Right view, is not about building some intricate system of special meditation techniques that will then culminate in release of all bad energy and involve a mystical experience, through practice and effort. It's about undoing the state of a *puthujjana*, the state of an ignorant ordinary person who is a prey to suffering. That state is the starting point for everyone. It's not about building something new on top of the state of an ignorant *puthujjana*, it's about removing everything that makes you a *puthujjana*. That's how you become a *sotapanna* free from suffering.

Lack of understanding, replaced with understanding, means that all the wrong views are gone. Lack of understanding in regard to what? In regards to the nature of your experience, the five aggregates, in regards to the suffering and freedom from it, in regard to any topic from the suttas. Fully understand those themes that matter and you would have then undone your ignorance that was maintaining your ignorant state of a *puthujjana*.

In terms of meditation, you don't have to start with some complex topics. Just pick up things/themes that you think you know and then really investigate them. By that, I mean, contemplate them rightly, not just think about the information you have about it. Pick up things you know, and see whether you really know them. Don't pull any punches, don't be afraid of what you might discover. Dedicate yourself to clarifying the meaning, which means make yourself open to the possibility of doubt, which can be very unpleasant. And the way you're going to deal with that doubt will be self-evident if you have your virtue established beforehand. If you've been living virtuously

and you recognise the necessity of that virtue, that will take care of the unpleasantness of doubt and restlessness and so on. But you have to go through with it. The longer a person who wants to practice Dhamma, avoids this, the harder it's going to be to do it later.

Ask yourself about the things you think you understood. Whatever it is, whatever sutta you read and you think you made sense of, question it or even ask yourself what do you want to get out of the practice? Do you want peace? How would you define that peace? Do you have clarity in regard to what peace means? What does it mean? Peaceful means non-disturbed. Okay, so take it a step further. What is the disturbance then? How are you disturbed? Are you disturbed when you experience things you don't want to experience? Are you disturbed when you don't experience things you want to experience? What's in common to any form of disturbance? What's in common is, it is suffering, it's unpleasant. If disturbance is not unpleasant, it wouldn't be a disturbance. So, you want peace, which is freedom from disturbance, which means peace is freedom from unpleasant feeling, freedom from suffering. Peace equals absence of suffering altogether.

Now, of course, that makes sense. But by going through these motions of repetitive self-reflexive contemplating, you're actually clarifying things layer by layer and next time when something bothers you, when you suffer on account of it, you will realise, "Well, I'm not automatically disturbed by things that bother me, I'm only disturbed when I start suffering on account of things that bother me, so peace is not, not having anything come my way. Peace is about not being disturbed, not suffering on account of whatever comes my way." Ultimately,

sickness, ageing and death will come your way, that's not negotiable. So these little layers that you will be undoing through reflection. That's all that matters. That's how you practice gradually, bit by bit.

When the Buddha says that the root of suffering is your own craving, not the conditions in regard to which you crave, then you can realise that you're affected by disturbance of any kind because you disturb yourself, nobody or nothing else does that to you. That can sound quite blunt in a way, but at the same time, it's the best possible news you can receive because if suffering were truly rooted in circumstances or other people's actions, you can't control that, you can't even access that and therefore you wouldn't be able to free yourself from it. But it isn't rooted in external circumstances, and that's the good news.

The Buddha's teaching should be considered as a very strict form of optimism. It's recognising the problem and knowing exactly what to do about it. Its recognising that the problem of you being disturbed by things which make you non-peaceful, lies in you craving for the present pleasant feeling, to stay longer or simply to stay, craving for the present unpleasant feeling to go away, as soon as possible, and craving for the neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling to be ignored or not to be experienced. Practically, those are the three attitudes that perpetuate your liability to suffering.

In order to stop craving in regard to these feelings, you have to learn how to discern these feelings for what they are. Which brings us to the questions we brought up earlier,"Feeling, feeling, what is feeling? When I say feeling, what am I referring to? What is that phenomenon? What is that thing, present in my

experience as a whole, that I designate by saying feeling?". How would you describe your pleasant feeling? Don't jump to conclusions, just pause, ask yourself the question, let the question endure for as long as it will and if your mind starts wandering away, ask the question again and then try to think about it a little bit more, but don't rush into an answer. Why? Because you don't want to be producing the answer, you want to be discerning it. Why? Because that present feeling is present. You don't need to answer it in order for that feeling to be there. The fact that you were able to designate it means it's there. It's your preconceived notions about the feeling, which obscures you understanding its nature. That's what Mūlapariyāyasutta is all about, it describes all the conceivings that you do on account of the arisen experience, not before the arisen experience. It's about clearing out your "conceivings" and discerning things in their *nature*. If you can discern the nature of the presently enduring feeling, then you will be unable to crave it.

67hh- Comprehending The Mindfulness Of Breathing And Death Contemplation

I. Mindfulness of Breathing

Ven. Thaniyo: I wanted to ask about mindfulness of breathing, and how that should be done. You can read the sutta over and over again and try to follow some sort of method, step-by-step. “You breathe in, then you breathe out. I’ll breathe in, thinking about my body.”

Ven. Nyanamoli: “I attend to this, I attend to that. I do this, I do that.”

Ven. Thaniyo: And you can actually run through all those steps forward, backward, however you want…

Ven. Nyanamoli: And still not do the mindfulness of breathing.

Ven. Thaniyo: So what is best to do?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Well, as the name itself says, it’s mindfulness —mindfulness of breathing. In order to do mindfulness of breathing, you need to know what mindfulness is.

Ven. Thaniyo: So, what is mindfulness?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Mindfulness, if done rightly, is effortless. Mindfulness is not something you can do. Mindfulness is something you discern on account of the presently enduring things—experience as a whole, that includes feelings, body, etc. There are many different ways you can establish mindfulness,

but the principle of mindfulness is the same. It's to be discerned.

So what is it that you discern in order to become mindful? Well, for example, you discern your presently enduring situation. So you have an option: you can be absorbed with the presently enduring situation—something can take 100% of your attention, i.e. you're dealing with this problem or looking at this or doing that; but including self-awareness into whatever you're doing, that's already a step closer to the proper mindfulness. And that's not something you can do, it's more like an attitude you can have in regard to things you do. That's why, fundamentally, a meditation "method" is inherently wrong from the point of view of mindfulness—because you can't be doing the mindfulness. Yet, as the Buddha said, meditation is nothing other than the unshakeable, imperturbable establishment of mindfulness. So if you're not doing mindfulness from the start, how can you magically establish it through something you do, some methods or repetitions? It's a recognition of your situation while at the same time, simultaneously with that recognition, you are in the situation. In other words, you can be sitting on a chair now, and with a corner of your eye, with the back of your mind, you're aware of that. That doesn't mean you need to stand up or lay down or start walking in order to know that you were seated on the chair. That's why the bodily postures or just awareness of the body is so fundamental. So mindfulness done properly means, basically, awareness of your situation, whether it's established upon the body or feelings or the state of minds (moods), it's established in that background, so you're not attending it. I don't have to keep sitting here thinking: "I'm seated… I'm seated… I'm seated". I don't need to keep repeating that to myself. Why? Because I already know that I'm seated,

even if I don't think about it. So if you were to ask me "what's your body posture?", I'll immediately say "I'm seated". And that's what you want to tap into, so to speak. The proper development of mindfulness is tapping into what you already know. It's not doing what you think you must be doing. "I'm seated… I'm seated… I'm feeling the chair… I'm feeling the chair… My legs are folded… I'm feeling the floor". That's all a result of you already knowing that you're seated, that's not your sitting. In other words, whether you're attending to your feet, your back or whatever else is going on while you're seated, that's secondary to the fact that you're already seated, and you already know that you're seated. So instead of giving in to that thinking of "I'm doing this… I'm doing this"—almost like exercising your sense of control over your meditation technique—you want to recognize that you already know what you're doing, and then just try not to forget that little bit, that one percent, that one grain. Don't forget what you already know, which means you don't need the active effort of reminding yourself that you're seated. All you need to do is just keep a corner of your eye on the fact that you already know that you're seated. And how do you know? Because you're seated. So that knowledge doesn't come from you, it's just a recognition of how things are. That's why through that mindfulness you learn how to discern how things are. That's why that type of mindfulness will result in discerning impermanence, suffering, lack of control… all of that. But it won't result in that if you do it on your own terms, which is thinking: "This is what I'm doing, this is my meditation… I'm touching… feeling… sitting". That's basically you doing what you think you should be doing, but the fact is that a puthujjana already starts with a wrong view, which means whatever he thinks he should be doing, he will be doing it with a wrong

view. That's why you can't have too much mindfulness either—because it's not doing. It's the recognition of what you already know, and that knowledge is not on you.

The same applies in regard to body postures or in regard to the presently enduring feeling. Again, that's something you already know, so if I ask you how do you feel, you might think about how you feel in this particular regard, but if I ask you how do you feel overall—Is it OK? How is your mood, generally?—you'll immediately know whether it's "plus" or "minus", so to speak. Whether it's OK or whether it isn't OK, whether it's neither. So it's tapping into what you already know, and you already know it because it's present on its own terms. Feeling is there enduring, whichever it is. And it's because of you not keeping a corner of your eye on what you already know that you get distracted, pulled by sensuality, ill-will, reacting, causing more trouble for yourself, all these things.

That's why people are afraid to be alone as well, because they're dependent on something to take away their attention, have something to attend to, including their meditation technique, and they don't stay with what they already know because it's frightening. Initially, at least. If you were to just not do anything, including your meditation technique, the pressure is going to start building up. It is about solitude, not doing anything. Doing is required for the maintenance of your being. That's why many people depend on activities of all sorts. Yes, you can have a good activity, bad activity, less bad activity, but overall, you depend on the activity. But mindfulness is not an activity! That's why you cannot have too much of it, and that's why you can actually develop wisdom on account of it if you start discerning it rightly. And that's why you need to know

what mindfulness is in order to do it rightly, not just saying: "OK, I'm mindful now". You can't start perfectly, you can't start rightly from the beginning, but you can certainly arrive at it if you don't take for granted what you think mindfulness is as mindfulness. You realize: if I were to know what mindfulness is, I would have at least the Right View. I would be at least a sotāpanna. So if I'm not a sotāpanna, that means I don't quite know what mindfulness is, so whatever I think mindfulness is, I must upgrade. Through that, I must discern it further. Either way, it's a win-win. If you already know what mindfulness is, great. Doing more of it cannot bring any harm. If you don't know what mindfulness is, and then you end up doing more, and you understand what mindfulness is, you win again. So you've nothing to lose by regarding yourself as not knowing quite what mindfulness is, or by investigating further.

The only thing you have to lose is your vanity and conceit that made you believe you already understood it, and that it's already helpful, already works and so on. Because if it does, you wouldn't have a problem upgrading it or pushing it further. Because if it truly works, it will stand that test—nothing will happen to it. But the fact that some people might be defending their meditation technique and get very touchy over it or over their practice of mindfulness means there's passion invested in it—there's conceit and vanity invested in it. And that's not mindfulness, then.

Now that we clarified what mindfulness is, we come to mindfulness of breathing. You can do the breathing, but you can't do the "mindfulness" in "mindfulness of breathing". In other words, saying mindfulness of breathing means knowledge of breathing, knowledge of the act of breathing. And

that's why the Buddha says in that sutta, "Knowingly he breaths in, knowingly he breaths out", that's what his mindfulness is. It's on that level of that discernment of what's already there. You want to be mindful of an activity, of something you do. What is the neutral activity that your body does whether you want it or not? It's breathing in, breathing out. So you want to be aware of the background of your act of breathing in and breathing out. In other words, you don't want to be attending to your breath directly—you want to make it become a background of whatever your mind is thinking. So you're mindful of breathing. Or you can even bring it to the foreground if you want, but again, not in a sense of thinking "I'm perceiving my breath…" or keep repeating "Nostrils… Nostrils…". Not like that. It still has to be on the level of that knowledge, because if I ask you now "Are you breathing?", you will know that you are. You don't have to stop breathing to give me the answer, you can't even doubt whether you're breathing or not. You already know that you're breathing. That's what you want to learn through the mindfulness of breathing—recognition of what you already know.

And that's not something you always have to maintain, or even can maintain 100% in front of you, thinking "I'm breathing… I'm breathing…". Let it drift away without losing sight of it. So, here you are, sitting, semi-comfortably (not too comfortably because you'll fall asleep), wide awake, eyes open, and you're breathing. And now know that you know that you're breathing. That's it. There is no "What do I do next?". Nothing. So there is the in-breath, there is the out-breath… there is the in-breath… Either way, they all stand within that knowledge of "I am breathing".

Whether it's a particular in-breath or a particular out-breath, the knowledge of breathing remains the same. That's why, then, the Buddha would say "He would breathe in like this, or like this… Short breath or long breath…" Point being, the knowledge of that breathing still stays the same—mindfulness gets established, regardless of the type of breath or how different it is.

And it's the same principle with mindfulness of the body. When the Buddha would say "he's mindful of the body like this (standing, sitting, laying down, etc.), or he's mindful to the extent necessary for final knowledge that 'body is there'". As in the ultimate background of any of your activities is the background of your body being present there as a basis on account of which you can do all these activities and engagements—feel feelings, perceive perceptions and so on. So if your mind never forgets that 0.01% of what it already knows of that body being a necessary basis for it, your mind cannot give rise to avijjā, whether you recognize it at that time or not doesn't matter—you're doing it rightly. If you're doing it rightly, the time will come when you've done it rightly sufficiently that you recognize what you've been doing rightly.

That's also another reason why nobody can accidentally stumble upon the Right View. It takes repetition of something you took either through intellectual discernment or on faith, but you've been doing it rightly, and when you've been doing it rightly sufficiently, then you recognize right as right, which is the basic definition of sotāpanna. "He knows kusala as kusala and akusala as akusala". But he wouldn't have arrived at it if he hadn't been doing it rightly on account of the utterance of

another and his own faith in it and rightly understanding it on that intellectual level.

Mindfulness of breathing is the same principle of mindfulness. Breathing is there. Whether it's a short breath, long breath, quick breath, slow breath…—breathing is there. And that's what you know. In a way, breathing is doing, but knowledge of breathing is not doing. Why would the Buddha then say doing? Because sometimes you want to do something. You want to replace coarse doing with refined doing. You want to replace unwholesome doing with wholesome doing, and breathing, being the most neutral type of doing, is the wholesome doing you can do, because it's just neutral. Doesn't harm anyone, doesn't harm you, doesn't harm others. You can develop mindfulness, you can develop knowledge of that neutral type of doing. And it's also repetitive, which means it doesn't require your attention as when you're solving a task or doing some menial work or whatever. It's just breathing—it happens whether you think about it or not. So you want to discern it on the level of doing, but discern it, not do it yourself. And how do you do that? Start breathing, secluded, alone. And ask yourself "Am I breathing right now? Yes." That's already an increment in the right direction of that knowledge—you already know you're breathing. Are you still breathing? Yes. So you still know you're breathing—same breathing, same knowledge. So you have the same thing enduring now. Now you don't even have to ask yourself whether you're breathing—you just remind yourself of what you already know. Yes, you are still breathing. So you can stop saying "still", you can just stay "Yes, I'm breathing". You don't even have to say it, you can't think it. When you become familiar with that, as in knowing that right now, you're still breathing, you can then look within that.

For example, noticing that the breath is quite slow right now, and you already know that. You're not doing it, you're discerning what's being done. Well, you can do it, but you realize that you doing it is secondary to the discernment of what's being done, and that's incidentally how you also overcome the nature of action, how you disown it, but let's not complicate things here. Ask yourself: are you still breathing? You are. All this time you had the same mindfulness of the same breathing. Particularly the breath kept going in, going out, but overall, breathing is there. Body sits, body stands up, body goes, body lays down—body is there. That's why ānāpānasāti results in the four foundations of mindfulness being brought to fulfillment, as the Buddha said. It doesn't result in mystical experiences of meditative lights and whatnot. It results in clarity of mindfulness. Clarity of mindfulness results in the Four Right Strivings, the Four Right strivings in the Enlightenment Factors, and that's it. No other work for you to be done. Why? Because you brought that knowledge of the nature of things to fulfillment.

Ven. Thaniyo: To the fore.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Well, yes. So bringing mindfulness of breathing to the fore means thinking: "OK, am I breathing now? Yes". Then you ask yourself: "Am I still aware that I am breathing now? Yes. How am I breathing now? Medium-pace." You can designate it if you want, there is no right answer to it. There's only right direction or wrong direction, as in there is only knowledge of it or non-knowledge of it. Ask yourself: "By the way, how am I feeling while I'm breathing right now? Overall, fundamentally pleasant. But am I still breathing? Yes." So your mindfulness is still "concerned" or "anchored", for the

lack of a better word, in the act of breathing. Then you think: "What are the thoughts that keep popping up in my mind while I'm breathing?" With the same breathing, same mindfulness, same knowledge of the same breathing. Maybe you're thinking about how long you can do this, what you do next and so on. Ask yourself, are those thoughts pleasant or unpleasant? All of this while you're breathing. You didn't stop breathing while you were thinking all of this. You haven't lost sight of the breath as the basis of all these things. Then you recognize, for example, "I'm feeling doubtful…" Or whatever you discover, as I said, there is no right answer, there is only losing the sight of your breathing, or not losing it. Then you might stop thinking about it, and ask yourself: "What's the state of my mind while I'm breathing? Am I depressed, am I elated, am I happy, am I sad? What is my mood?" While you're breathing in and breathing out—all this time. And there you go. You don't need to do anything else when it comes to mindfulness of breathing. Just keep doing that, because you'll be developing mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of mind and mindfulness of thoughts, which are the Satipaṭṭhāna. Which is why the Ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118) says that—fulfillment of ānāpānasati brings the fulfillment of satipaṭṭhāna. Nothing else.

Ven. Thaniyo: It also says that you get rid of distracting thoughts.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Exactly, because they're all rooted in losing the sight of that peripheral—in losing mindfulness, basically. Not being anchored in the recognition of what's peripherally enduring.

Ven. Thaniyo: The background.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Exactly, that's lust, aversion… That is a necessary basis for lust, aversion, and distraction to arise—losing sight of what you already know, i.e. that certain feelings, body, intentions, perceptions, etc. are enduring there on their own in that background. And you actively choose to ignore them. That's why everybody's fully responsible for their greed, aversion, and delusion. It's not accidental, it's maintained through your consciously-made decisions. Not that you fully understand the decisions you're making, but you are making them. You choose to go down sensuality, you choose to go down the ill-will—you choose to not say no to those things, including distraction. That's why all someone who understands that needs to do is stop delighting in it. He doesn't stop thinking sensual thoughts or bad thoughts, but he stops delighting in them. That's how you stop thinking them. Not by preventing them from arising, but by not fueling them further. If you're just mindful: "I'm seated… I'm seated…", you're not doing anything. So you could fall asleep or you could get easily distracted. But breathing is something that's done, which means it's more active. Yet, at the same time, the principle of mindfulness is not compromised because it doesn't really take away your attention. On the basis of knowing that breathing is there, you can discern what kind of breathing is there. On the basis of knowing that breathing is there, you can discern what feeling is there. On the basis of knowing that breathing is there, you can discern what mood is there. On the basis of knowing that breathing is there, you can discern what exactly your mind is thinking right now—particular thoughts of this or that. So on the basis of doing things, you're discerning what's present. You develop that, that means there will be less and less chances of being distracted even when you're not practicing actively in meditation.

Whether you're sweeping leaves, walking, sitting, extending your limbs, that mindfulness pertains to it. Because, again, you don't necessarily have to think "I'm breathing… I'm breathing…", because you already know you're breathing. So you just learn, basically, how to tap into that point of view of that breathing being already there—of that body being already there—which automatically is something that is not your point of view, because you are not doing it.

Ven. Thaniyo: You could say it comes before your point of view…?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Well, it comes before your appropriation of the point of view through action. As in when you think: "I'm looking at this, I'm doing this, that's my point of view". But the only reason you're able to do that is because these things are there on their own enduring already—body is there, feelings are there, perceptions are there, intentions are there, pretty much. So, again, there are no steps to mindfulness of breathing—there is mindfulness of breathing and different aspects of it, of the same principle of mindfulness of breathing. I'm breathing, I'm still breathing. Still the same mindfulness, all this time since we've been talking about it. Lots of things have changed on a particular level—new thoughts, new moods, new feelings—yet that breathing is still the same. Mindfulness, knowledge of that same breathing is still there.

Ven. Thaniyo: And that breathing is a nutriment, you could say.

Ven. Nyanamoli: It's a basis, it's a reference point, an anchor—a background, basically, of everything else more particular.

Ven. Thaniyo: And one can see that eventually, at least…

Ven. Nyanamoli: Well, there is no "endgame". There is not an "and then this happens". If you just keep doing mindfulness of breathing, what's going to happen is everything inferior to it, everything more particular to it is going to be purified of greed, aversion, and delusion. It's going to be purified of the basis of non-mindfulness. Why? Because you're developing the basis of mindfulness. Through doing it, you're removing the nutriment for all the unwholesome things you've been doing and deciding to do. Mindfulness of breathing is on the level of mindfulness of death, or any other mindfulness. That's why the Buddha taught it as a replacement to Maranānussati. He said, "Instead of that, because some monks couldn't quite handle it, practice mindfulness of breathing". But it's the same goal. As in stick with the most fundamental discernment of things not being in your control, being already there enduring despite whether you want them or not, whether you do them or not. It is a death of your sense of self. Death of your activity, of the notion that you are the one who maintains things, that you're the one who's in control. That sense just gets completely pushed out, fades away.

Ven. Thaniyo: So, when to do mindfulness of death? How is that done? Where is the death that you're mindful of?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Again, start with mindfulness of the body. You start seeing the body as a necessary, organic, made out of organs, thing in the world because of you which you experience the world and everything in it. All your happiness, sadness, choices and decisions are inconceivable if the body wasn't there, simultaneously present and living. Do you have any say in that? That body that you find there—that you were given, of a certain height, certain complexion, whatever—can you make it not age? Can you prevent it from getting sick? Can you

ultimately command to it to never die? So those are the first three basic things that people don't dwell on. That's why the Buddha said that people are intoxicated with life, intoxicated with youth, intoxicated with health. You choose to become intoxicated by refusing to look at the obvious characteristics of it because they're unpleasant, they fill you with anxiety.

Ven. Thaniyo: So that's that inevitable possibility of death.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Yes. So once you start recognizing that the presence of the body is just a necessary nutriment for your experience as a whole, of any kind, you stop being concerned with the particulars of that experience, such as: "This bothers me… this makes me happy…" You realize that it's fundamental nature is undermined by the presence of the living body. And when that changes, none of it can remain standing a second longer—none of your feelings or things can stay. So how can they be yours? And that's basically beginning to acknowledge death—the destruction that is impending upon the body, upon the senses. Decay, fading away, disintegration. You think about that, you're going to be less and less intoxicated with things that come through it—with your sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts. Why? Because you recognize that whatever they are, they cannot step outside of the confinement of the necessary basis of this living body. You think: "Am I breathing? Yes. What position is the body in? It's seated." That seated body while you're breathing in and out right now, what are its characteristics? Just describe it in any terms to yourself. The most obvious one is it's just there, isn't it? It's living, it's just there. Do you have a say in any of those characteristics? Can you change them? Can you tell them to be otherwise? So while I'm breathing, and my body is seated, that body that I'm

discerning—while the breathing is there—is independent of me, isn't it? I can use it, but I cannot uphold it—I cannot step outside of it and own it. I cannot tell it what to do. It's only borrowed, which means everything else that you get through your body is equally borrowed. And if something is borrowed, is it right for me to regard it as mine and belonging to me? No. If something is borrowed, is it right for me to grieve and be sad over it being taken away? No. You require active ignoring of the fact that you're not in control in order to grieve over it or be happy over it. Hence, mindfulness, if done rightly, results in discernment of the natural principles, which is what Dhamma is—nature. The nature of things. You could see how different that is from watching your nostrils and "belly-bhāvanā", or whatever they call it. Completely different. It's not like thinking: "I'm doing this… I'm feeling my belly rising and falling, rising and falling…" Zero discernment there. You're just trying to attend to the momentary presence of things hoping that it will magically result in knowledge. Looking for meaning results in knowledge. Delving with the knife, self-questioning, self-interrogation—all the things the Buddha talks about in the suttas—that's what results in knowledge.

II. Death Contemplation

Ven. Thaniyo: What about watching someone die?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Well, with the right attitude, sure, but not without the right attitude. Watching someone die and then seeing that your living body—right here, right now—is more related to that dying body than to your sense of ownership of your body. It's in the same domain as the other dying bodies, not in the domain of your notion of "this is my body". That's

how you undermine your control, your sense of control. You can't directly choose to not control it or not own it, but you can undermine it. Hence, seeing that body is impermanent, because of that, body cannot be the reason for lust and satisfaction, automatically you experience that body as "not mine". Sabbe saṇkhārā anicca, sabbe saṇkhārā dukkha, sabbe dhammā anattā.

Ven. Thaniyo: So in Dependent Origination, it says "With birth, aging & death is". So this life—this manifestation of life, what I see as a whole—all that is subject to fading away.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Yes, but that doesn't need to be your "subject", or you don't need to be subjected to it. You are subjected to it because you have appropriated birth, you appropriated the given body, you appropriated the possibilities of the given body and the senses—you appropriated it by delighting in it, by pursuing pleasures that are secondary to it, that come on the basis of it. You can't engage in sensual pleasure without appropriation of the body, it's inconceivable. So through engaging in sensual pleasure, you're responsible for your appropriation of the body. And then, you're liable to whatever that body is liable to: accidents, aging, death, sickness, all of it. Hence, it's on you, because you took it, through carelessly pursuing sensuality.

Ven. Thaniyo: The body will always age and will always die.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Yes, but if you stop regarding it as yours, it's not your problem. Inasmuch as these aging trees and other people's bodies are not your problem because they're not yours. That's why they're not your problem. It's not that they're not your problem because they're other people's. They're not your

problem because you never considered other people to be yours—but, incidentally, say if it's your son, your daughter, your partner, suddenly you're emotionally affected. Why? Because they're "yours". So yes, you can appropriate other people as well. Your friends, for example. And that's why you suffer. Not because they're dying, you suffer because you appropriated them and now you're feeling that because you're liable to it. So you have a choice. If you want to be free from suffering, you have to give up all the appropriation. If you don't want to give up the appropriation, that's absolutely fine, but then you make yourself liable to suffering. Again, there is a slight contradiction there, because if you were to be honest with yourself and ask "Why don't I want to give up all the appropriations?" you would answer "Because it's unpleasant". So you're still governed by the same principle of wanting to avoid suffering. That's why people protect their attachments and appropriations—because they don't want to suffer. Ironically, you suffer because of that. If you were to take the initial hit of suffering, ultimately, you can free yourself from suffering. But if you are too weak to take the initial hit of suffering, you make yourself liable to it indefinitely. Either way, nobody wants to suffer. Even people who say "I want to suffer", they don't. They want to suffer because that provides them pleasure—because not getting that pleasure means actual suffering. That's why the Buddha himself could've not taught anything different than suffering and the cessation of it. Because that is at the root, universally, of every human, regardless of their culture, education, identity, and whatnot. That is always the basic principle—avoid pain; have pleasure. Not having enough pleasure, or getting more pleasure, means avoiding the pain of not having enough pleasure.

Ven. Thaniyo: And what do you think about the common idea where a lot of people say “I’m not afraid of death”?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Well, they’re not afraid of what they think death is, which means they don’t know what death is. Because only two people are not afraid of death—a fully enlightened arahant or a fully deluded puthujjana. But one of them is fully liable to death, another one is fully free from it. But they both are not afraid of it. One is not afraid due to the sheer amount of ignorance and not even knowing what death is, another is not afraid because he’s completely overcome it. So unless you’re an arahant, you are afraid of death. And if you don’t feel the fear, it’s because you’re covering it up. Don’t think that death is what you think death is. Think that death is basically where you can’t get your pleasures, where you can’t get the usage of your senses. Find the fears you have in your life, and you’ll see death is at the other end of them, whatever those fears might particularly be, or whichever particular way they manifest. Whatever brings people anxiety, death is on the other side of that. If you say “I’m not afraid of death, that brings me no anxiety” it’s because your idea of what death is is completely wrong. But something will be bringing you anxiety, and that’s what death is, hence the anxiety.

Ven. Thaniyo: One might say: “I’m afraid of losing all my friends”.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Well, there you go. Death is at the other end of that. That’s just a hint of where death is. Not having anyone, being all alone, losing it all. Or simply losing things that are dear to you. Or even more simply, as the Buddha said, being separated from the agreeable, and being united with the

disagreeable. That's what suffering is. And the ultimate suffering is death. You might think: "I'm not afraid of dying, but I'm afraid of what people think about me". There you go. Death is basically not having a say in what people will think about you ultimately. That's the most frightening thing, isn't it? Well, for those who fear that. Or you might think: "I'm not afraid of dying, but I'm afraid of losing my wealth, "I'm afraid of losing my family."

Ven. Thaniyo: Or "I'm afraid of public speaking".

Ven. Nyanamoli: And you ask yourself why is that? Because it's the ultimate experience of non-control. You have control over your speaking, but you have zero control over how people will take that—what will they say? What will they think?

So, ultimately, what is the fear of death? It's fear of the ultimate non-control. And it's not incidental that one thing or the other will have to be reminding you of that, because the whole human experience is about covering the fact that you're not in control, covering the fact that you're liable to dying, inevitably liable to dying. So all these things, loss, public speaking, whatever frightens people, frightens them because it's the ultimate reminder of the cessation of any notion of control they might have. So if people say "I'm not afraid of dying", it's because that thought is in their control, and they think that's what dying is. So they're not afraid of it. They think: "Everybody dies". True. But why are you afraid of public speaking? Everybody speaks, yet here you are, terrified of public speaking. Why? Because you are constantly looking away from the fact that you're not in control. And when you encounter experiences where you cannot ignore that fact that you're not

in control, it frightens the hell out of you. And that's what death is—the ultimate cessation of any ground for your notion of control that you take to be the most fundamental thing. "I am, therefore things are mine, therefore I'm in control".

Ven. Thaniyo: So anattā is basically seeing death.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Yes, seeing death, sure. Seeing death correctly means not being able to entertain the notion of control, which means not being my own self, not being my self, not belonging to me, non appropriation—that's all anattā.

Ven. Thaniyo: So if I see that for myself…

Ven. Nyanamoli: It's going to scare the hell out of you. That's what happened in the suttas. If today people are not scared when they read about anattā* and *nibbāna*, it's because they don't have a clue what it is, what it really is. So for a *puthujjana*, *nibbāna* is closer to what death is, the one that he's ignoring. So a *puthujjana*, through ignoring death, actually ignores the possibility of *nibbāna*. That's why those people who came to the Buddha, the way the Buddha would lay it out on them, they couldn't ignore it and would fall on the ground in complete anxious despair and have a mental breakdown. Saying: "This will kill me! This will destroy me!". Because they still gratuitously assume the priority of their sense of "I am", despite the evidence showing the contrary. They think: "I'm not giving up the notion of 'I am', thus I will be destroyed." But if you hear the teaching, you realize that could have not been yours even if you wanted it to, and the only reason you were regarding it as yours is because you didn't know that it cannot be yours. And how do you find out that it cannot be yours? Through practicing

mindfulness correctly and seeing that it is inseparable from the necessary basis of things that cannot be yours.

Dwelling on the characteristics of the necessity of the body, the independence of the presently enduring feeling, presently enduring perceptions, yet seeing yourself inseparable from it. That means, basically, re-molding, re-shaping, going against the grain, and forcing yourself to see that your own self depends on a basis that cannot be your self. Because if it were so, the body would not age, would not get sick and would not die. If it were so, the feelings would not change—they would always be pleasant, the way you want them to. Yet the Buddha said: "If that feeling is yours, which one is it? Why do you experience displeasure if feeling is yours?" You wouldn't do so if you were in control. So through reminding yourself that you're not in control—through practicing *maranānussati* correctly—you get to undermine your sense of self gradually so that you won't freak out and have a breakdown, although some monks did, that's why the Buddha told them to do mindfulness of breathing instead. Because if done rightly, it results in the same principles being discerned.

Ven. Thaniyo: So if you were truly unafraid of death, how would you take other people's deaths?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Equably. Equally unafraid of it. You would not be oblivious to what's happening, like some sort of robot who lost the significance of things. It's still your friend dying, but no amount of the extent of that experience—perception and feeling in regard to it—can overturn your mind and make you think that which isn't yours is, or that which isn't permanent is. The only attitude you could possibly have is "how could it be

otherwise?". How can something that's been born and grown not die? It's actually insanity to think otherwise. So grieving over death is on the level of insanity. Because it's inconceivable for somebody who understood the nature of death to think "But if only…" It just doesn't apply. How can it be otherwise?

Ven. Thaniyo: But you have to get used to this, because I think it'd be difficult to do it while you're dying…

Ven. Nyanamoli: Oh, good luck with that. If you've never done it while you were alive—if you haven't uncovered the nature of death while you were alive—you're not going to do it when you're dying. It's too late. So you want to start facing it as soon as you can. That's why, basically, understanding of death, understanding of the ultimate non-control, means ultimately giving things up—relinquishing appropriation and assumption. That's why understanding that fully means nibbāna. That's why a Sotāpanna, who understood the nature of nibbāna, or an ariyasāvaka in general, is often spoken about in the suttas as "If he doesn't attain it during his life, he attains when he's dying". Why? Because that's where it comes from, the direction of dying and cessation of control. Now, if he got careless and lazy during his lifetime and hasn't been making the effort, death will force him in the direction that he already understood. That's why sometimes ariyasāvaka can become an arahant at the moment of dying—it's not some mystical light that appears before you die. It's the direction you understood through your Right View and everything else, and now you're dragged there, and you already understood it, so you're dragged where you should have gone while you were still alive. So it's still good to understand it, but it's even better to do it now and not wait to be dragged there by death, even for ariyasāvakas.

Ven. Thaniyo: It reminds me of that sutta that says “See as though blind”—as though you were already blind.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Right. Well, see as though you already relinquished your sight. That’s what it means. Doesn’t mean to pretend you’re blind and not seeing, because what you’re seeing was never a problem—it was because of you owning your eyes and what comes through, that you were affected by everything else that’s experienced on account of it. So if you don’t forget that the necessary basis for any sight you have is the physical organs of your eye that you’re not in control of, that will ultimately be diminished and destroyed, you cannot possibly have desire toward anything you see. The necessary basis for the desire toward sights is losing the sight of (no pun intended)—losing the perspective of the nature of the eye that’s the necessary basis for any sights. So, ultimately, you’re going to be blind when you die. You will be deaf when you die. So seeing the ultimate result (death) in regard to your senses will make you overcome anything that comes through anything that comes through your senses. But that doesn’t mean you’re pretending you’re not seeing, which is that wrong view that the man who talked to the Buddha had, “I’m acting like I’m blind and deaf. I’m ignoring sights and sounds, I’m pretending I’m not seeing and not hearing”, and then the Buddha said, “Well, you’re no better than a blind and a deaf man”. That’s something different. That’s when people blame the sights and sounds and any other senses for their suffering, failing to see that suffering is applicable to them because they appropriated the senses, not because of what comes through them. So are you still breathing while we’re discussing this particular approach of senses and eyes and blindness and deafness? Yes. Still the same breath—still the same basis for your mindfulness enduring for like an

hour now. So we've been doing mindfulness of breathing all this time and discerning the Dhamma within it. On the terms of the universal principles, not on your own terms. Or as accurately as you can, whichever way you start. That's why it says: "He looks at the signs and characteristics". The features of this thing. He doesn't jump at the answers that his mind provides. Am I breathing? Yes. What would be the characteristics of this breathing? Characteristics, not mechanical description, such as thinking: "My lungs are moving…" or whatever—that's irrelevant. What is the nature of this act of breathing? Can I stop it when I want to? Well, only relatively so. Can I make sure it never goes away? No, not really. Do I have a say in that which is necessary for the act of breathing, the breathing apparatus? Not in the slightest. If an accident were to happen or a bacteria or virus were to attack these organs, would I still be able to breathe as freely? No. So I'm taking for granted that it will be forever, that it'll be in my control, that it'll be unobstructed. Why am I taking that for granted? Because I'm not thinking sufficiently enough that I cannot take it for granted. That's it. What is the condition for ignorance? It's ignoring, basically. You stop ignoring, you stop conditioning your ignorance. Stop ignoring certain universal truths, that's it.

70hh- The Stream Entry of Ajahn Chah

On Views

> **“The practice of Dhamma goes against our habits, the truth goes against our desires, so there is difficulty in the practice. Some things which we understand as wrong may be right, while the things we take to be right may be wrong. Why is this? Because our minds are in darkness, we don’t clearly see the Truth. We don’t really know anything and so are fooled by people’s lies. They point out what is right as being wrong and we believe it; that which is wrong, they say is right, and we believe that. This is because we are not yet our own masters. Our moods lie to us constantly. We shouldn’t take this mind and its opinions as our guide, because it doesn’t know the truth.”**
>
> – Ajahn Chah, ‘Right View, the place of coolness’

Nm: That is a good example of how differently you could take what he just said. As he said, obviously you can’t trust your moods; the starting point is that you don’t have a right reference point to know right as right, or wrong as wrong. But many people would use this information to justify dismissing everything, and not committing to anything, because ‘everything is not sure.’ as sometimes Ajahn Chah would say.

If you take that last sentence for example: ‘We shouldn’t take this mind and its opinions to be our guide,’ you can take that to

mean: ‘Ah-hah! So I shouldn’t have any views!’ Failing to see that in saying so, that is in itself the view that you hold onto, ‘I will not commit to any view’.

> **“Master Gotama, this is my doctrine and view:”Nothing is my preference."**
>
> **“Aggivessana, do you not prefer the view”Nothing is my preference“?”**
>
> – MN 74

Yes, you should not commit to any view so that *you can keep looking for the right view*. But you should not refuse to commit to any view as a goal in itself.

Some people think that they can find a way out of views by just refusing to commit to any views, and that is quite a popular belief. They might quote people like Ajahn Chah to justify this, but you can see what a misquote that would be because he does not say that. He says that your starting point is that you don’t know right as right and wrong as wrong - that is the *puthujjana’s* necessary starting point. What you need to do from that starting point is to make the effort to clarify things for yourself - not make an effort to refuse to commit to anything because everything is seen as risky and dangerous.

Continuation of the Ajahn Chah passage:

> **“Some people don’t want to listen to others at all, but this is not the way of a man of wisdom.”**

Nm: You really want to take that seriously. People might think ‘Oh sure, I have no problem listening to others.’ But ask

yourself: can I be mentally disturbed by hearing someone else's view? For example, if you have an idea of what the practice of Dhamma is, and now somebody challenges this; or simply has a different view to yours - ask yourself: "Would I be affected by that? Am I threatened, do I feel a need to defend myself, or even justify myself - to myself? I might not necessarily get into an argument with someone, but am I personally affected by the opposing view, whether by doubt, unrest, or similar?"

If the answer is yes, that is what that means: you don't want to hear others, which is why you are not wise nor developing wisdom. There is absolutely no reason to be affected by anything, let alone for someone else's view to give rise to emotion in you. There is no justification for it. You do not learn by going and debating with everyone, you learn by understanding right as right, wrong as wrong. But if you keep protecting whatever you have, out of fear of perhaps being wrong, it means you will never know wrong as wrong and right as right, because you are not committing to learning it.

Continuation of passage:

> **"A wise man listens to everything. One who listens to Dhamma must listen just the same, whether he likes it or not, and not blindly believe or disbelieve. He must stay at the half-way mark, the middle point, and not be heedless. He just listens and then contemplates and sees the cause and effect for himself before he believes what he hears."**

Nm: He listens and he understands what that thing is saying, understands the meaning of it. That is exactly how he can know whether it is right or not, whether it is according to the

Dhamma or not. And how can you understand the meaning of something if you never make the effort to understand it?

Continuation of passage:

> **"Even if the teacher speaks the truth, don't just believe it, because you don't yet know the truth of it for yourself."**

Nm: You need to understand it for yourself. Not "see it for yourself" in the sense of having some kind of mystical experience - no you need to *understand* it. The aim is not to have some completely inexpressible, idiosyncratic experience that nobody can relate to but somehow "it's my truth". That is simply a mystical experience, that's the only "truth" of it, while what needs to be understood is the universal nature of *all* experience that applies to all beings, consisting of the five aggregates.

That is why that understanding is what frees you, and everyone can relate to it, always. The Dhamma doesn't change, in the sense that the universal principles remain the same regardless of whether the path is revealed or not. But it cannot be revealed to you if you are not making an effort to discern it; it cannot occur accidentally or spontaneously. An experience that you can't explain or put in words may indeed be real, as such: a real mystical experience. But if you can't put it into words, you have not understood it.

> **"That bhikkhu is liberated by directly knowing this: the extent of designation and the extent of the way for designation; the extent of language and the extent of the way for language; the extent of**

> **description and the extent of the way for description; the extent of wisdom and the extent of the sphere for wisdom, the extent of the round and the extent to which the round turns. To say of a bhikkhu who is liberated by directly knowing this that he holds the view"One does not know and does not see" - that would not be proper."**
>
> – DN 15

Continuation of passage:

> **"Most of us have the wrong view. It's just like a maggot - a maggot's living place is filthy, its food is filthy...but they suit the maggot. If you take a stick and brush it away from its lump of dung, it'll struggle to crawl back in. It's the same when the teacher teaches us to see rightly. We resist, it makes us feel uneasy. We run back to our 'lump of dung' because that's where we feel at home. We're all like this. If we don't see the harmful consequences of all our wrong views then we can't leave them, the practice is difficult. So we should listen. There's nothing else to the practice."**

Nm: You should listen to one who knows what he is talking about. You should not just listen to anybody appointed a teacher by an institution or tradition. If you have faith, based on discernment and wisdom, that the person you are listening to is correct - then yes, you should listen, and make the effort to practice.

You can also interpret what Ajahn Chah said there as referring to sense restraint, and think that simply by practicing restraint you are going against the grain, against your habits. But there he is really talking about the views, not only sense restraint; that's an important difference. How many people actively challenge their own existential views, invite on existential doubt in order to uproot it? Not many. Many people can live a restrained life, but that does not differentiate a person from a restrained householder: only the right view does. For the right view, being a renunciate is not enough; you must challenge your views.

Q: *When you say 'if you don't have right view, you don't know' – this might give the impression that since we don't know, we can't really claim to understand anything by ourselves and we are probably in the wrong, so should therefore have to simply have faith in somebody else who says they have the right view.*

Nm: Being aware that you do not have the right view does not justify you following someone blindly, regardless if that person has the right view or not. "Challenging your views" does not equate to just doing what a teacher tells you to do, without reading the suttas, without thinking for yourself. Even if that teacher is himself an *arahant*, that is not enough for you to become one. You cannot just "do what he tells you to do" with the expectation that this will automatically give results.

So even if it is your own teacher and somebody who does know what they are talking about, you must investigate that. (You must take responsibility for the views that you hold, regardless of how you have acquired them or from whom you have heard them)

I can give you verbatim instruction and you can go through exactly the same motions as I do, but if your attitude is one of not accepting responsibility, nothing will work because there is no Dhamma there! You going through these motions will be literally just motions, without Dhamma.

> **“Do not go by the thought ‘This ascetic is our teacher.’”**
>
> – AN 3.65

Continuation of passage:

> **"If we have Right View, wherever we go we are content. I have practised and seen this already. These days there are many monks, novices and lay people coming to see me. If I still didn’t know, if I still had the wrong view, I’d be dead by now! The right abiding place for monks, the place of coolness, it’s just Right View itself. We shouldn’t look for anything else.**

Nm: There is no safe ground lower than the Right view.

That is why I keep insisting on this point with people who say that they don’t have the Right view, but yet think that they are on the right track with their practice. You can only know that if you have the Right view. Until you have the Right view you shouldn’t think you are on the right track, because it will make you complacent to that extent. If you are aiming for and content with anything lower than the Right view, you can expect a result even lower than that. You should really be aiming for higher, so that at least you might get the Right view as a result.

“Mundane” Right View

“Therein, bhikkhus, right view comes first. And how does right view come first? One understands wrong view as wrong view and right view as right view: this is one’s right view.

“And what, bhikkhus, is wrong view? ‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed; no fruit or result of good and bad actions; no this world, no other world; no mother, no father; no beings who are reborn spontaneously; no good and virtuous recluses and brahmins in the world who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world.’ This is wrong view.

“And what, bhikkhus, is right view? Right view, I say, is twofold: there is right view that is affected by taints, partaking of merit, ripening in the acquisitions; and there is right view that is noble, taintless, supramundane, a factor of the path.

“And what, bhikkhus, is right view that is affected by the taints, partaking of merit, ripening in the acquisitions? ‘There is what is given and what is offered and what is sacrificed; there is fruit and result of good and bad actions; there is this world and the other world; there is mother and father; there are beings who are reborn spontaneously; there are in the world good and virtuous recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world.’ This is right view affected by taints, partaking of merit, ripening in the acquisitions.”

– MN 117

Q: *What about this "mundane" or ordinary right view, isn't this also a kind of a right view?*

Nm: The Right view I was referring to is the Right view of a *sotāpanna*; freedom from suffering. The mundane right view doesn't free you from suffering, it is a right basis for the noble Right view. That doesn't mean that it doesn't count or doesn't matter – you can't have the Right view of a *sotāpanna* without the mundane right view. But in having the mundane right view, you are still a *puthujjana*.

(At the same time, the mundane right view shouldn't be underestimated or taken for granted.) Most practitioners, even supposedly serious Buddhist practitioners, don't even have the mundane right view. If you start thinking about the mundane right view and take it seriously, you realise it is already quite an accomplishment in undoing lots of wrong views, and it involves developing quite a lot of self-transparency, and recognition of the nature of things.

The mundane right view is basically about authenticity and self-transparency: recognition of the validity of an arisen thing as a phenomena. 'There is good and bad, mother and father, there is this life and the next life' - there is the fact that I don't know something!

All these things represent a certain threshold of recognising how things genuinely appear, how things are, that is not overly interpreted in a materialistic way, nor mystified. The basis of the arisen experience – as a starting point. Not coming out of a view that you have preconceived. "There IS Rebirth! – because I

believe in it, not because I see it." Or equally, "There is NO Rebirth – because I don't believe in it, not because I see it." What you have to recognise first is the fact that "I don't know" - lack of knowledge as a factual thing, an arisen thing.

(The wrong view is rarely very obvious or explicitly stated.) People might say for example, "Oh yes of course there is mother, there is father," but then when you ask them more, they will immediately jump onto the view of modern science and medicine and talk about how "sure, it looks like a mother or father, but in *reality* it's just a bunch of atoms and electrons and in reality there is nothing there, just all these atoms and electrons constantly changing."

It is also common to use this to explain why "everything is changing, everything is impermanent," and you often hear people saying that modern science is proving that the Buddha's teaching is correct - though that has nothing to do with the Buddha's teaching whatsoever. You can see that view even among fully committed Buddhist practitioners, undermining the basic reality of the world that they themselves have experienced. You can't avoid that basic reality but you can certainly misinterpret it and cover it up with your view. One who does this doesn't even have a mundane right view, because their views deny the basic, "mundane" aspects of their experience.

That is what it means to say "there is mother, there is father" – that's it, there is no lower threshold than that [for what is real or true] in your experience. For example, take an emotionally charged experience like your father getting sick. Most people's practice is about *covering up* even that basic starting point – far

from recognising it – because it bothers them. The practice becomes management of what already bothers you, and the management is done through the wrong views: e.g. 'Well, fundamentally it is just a collection of atoms…' – which is just another way of saying 'fundamentally, in reality, there is no father.'

But in reality your father is there, that is your starting point – and if you start thinking like that, your practice *cannot* be management, it can only result in uprooting the problem in the first place. You have no leeway, no way out, of denying the things that are there, that already bother you – experience of mother, experience of father, experience of doubt. These are the arisen, factually enduring, present states of your mind. And if you practice the Dhamma rightly, they will not be able to bother you in the first place – so there is no need, no reason for you to deny your mother, your father, divine realms… Why would you?

The only reason people deny them is that they don't know the way out of suffering.

When you start to recognise things just as they are in your experience – "this is the experience of having a mother, this is the experience of having a father; this is the experience of doubt; this is the experience of sensuality" – you are already starting to withdraw yourself from the material content of those things that we are all so focused on. That is the necessary basis for starting to discern the signs of the mind as phenomena.

On the other hand, having these preconceived views prevents you from seeing your own mind as a thing that has arisen,

which is a prerequisite for the arising of the Right view (*citta-nimitta*). How can you see your mind as an enduring thing, when with your views you are denying even obvious enduring things? You need the mundane right view as a basis for seeing things that matter; mind, feeling, intentions. Then the impermanence you discern within that is the impermanence of ownership, the impossibility to be a controller-master of things, the impermanence of your sense of self. Not the impermanence of a random stone, tree, table, etc.

What defines wrong view as a wrong view is that it contradicts the universal aspects of your own experience. The Buddha did not 'invent' the Right view, he just discerned it on the right terms. But to see it, you do need the right instruction and you will never accidentally arrive at it, because everything points in the wrong direction.

Q: *What about the experience of kamma and vipaka, we don't have this experience?*

Nm: The Buddha never said to figure out and settle all the details of 'how *kamma* and *vipaka* works' – he actually said:

> **"The results of action (kammavipako), monks, are incalculable, and not to be calculated. One who tries to calculate them will become mad or frustrated."**
>
> – AN 4.77

But what you can recognise is that very possibility, that very uncertainty: 'I don't know to what extent my actions will bear fruit.' That is your factual experience right here and now. How would you act then, if you are not dismissing *kamma*, nor

having a perfectly clear-cut template of how *kamma* works? You realise that 'I don't actually know – so I had _better be very carefu_l, since even when I think something might not be a problem, I don't know for myself so it is not worth the risk.'

Q: *Part of the mundane right view says 'there are in the world good and virtuous recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world.'*

Nm: Again, it is important to recognise that *possibility* of direct knowledge as a real thing. Usually, almost automatically, people start denying the basic manifestation of things, and they end up with the view of 'there is nothing truly to be attained.' If you take the view that nothing can be trusted, you don't commit to anything, then it follows naturally 'What, *sotāpanna*? No, no, nothing to be attained anyway, that's more attachment, the more you practice the less you know' and so on.

Thinking like this, you won't even feel responsible for not becoming a *sotāpanna*, instead you deny it so that you don't feel obliged to do it.

It always comes back to accepting responsibility. It is possible to be free from suffering – that possibility is present in everyone's experience right here and now. It always was, always will be. There is possibility of direct knowledge – so that means there is *my* possibility of direct knowledge, possibility of *my* awakening. So what do you then do with that?

You can see: 'there is a possibility to be free – and I am perfectly free to decide *not* to go that way – but then I will also be perfectly responsible for not getting the results of it.' That is the

first thing that hit me when I started reading the suttas as a layman. When the Buddha said:

> **"Bhikkhus, both formerly and now, what I make known is suffering and the cessation of suffering."**
>
> – MN 22

I had never even found somebody saying that, but now finally somebody directly said it, and I felt that: 'I don't have to follow it. I could go the other way. But if I choose not to become a monk and practice this, I am fully responsible for whatever happens to me for the rest of my life, even if it is 'not my fault' in lay terms.'

I couldn't ignore that. I would be responsible for even things that are completely out of my control – good or bad - if I were to choose to stay in the domain where they can happen. There is the world, there is freedom from the world. When you choose the world, the realm of Mara, you choose everything that comes with it – on account of that choice to not renounce it.

How can a person, without fully acknowledging that choice and taking that responsibility – how can he then take the practice seriously? He can't. His practice will have a magical connection to the result. 'I'm devotional, I meditate, I respect tradition, I watch my nostrils and the soles of my feet, and then Enlightenment will *happen to me* on account of these observances and duties that I do.'

Enlightenment cannot 'happen to you' – you can only develop it. In order to develop it, you need to understand what it is – and

how can you understand what it is if you are denying the basic possibility of it, in the first place?

As Nanavira said,

> **"So long as you are content to put the sotāpanna on a pedestal well out of reach, it can never possibly occur to you that it is your duty to become sotāpanna yourself (or at least to make the attempt) here and now in this very life; for you will simply take it as axiomatic that you cannot succeed…you are not required to admire a sotāpanna, but to become one."**

https://nanavira.org/index.php/letters/post-sotapatti/1963/102-l-50-19-may-1963

It is a hard thing to do and the only way to do it is to fully accept responsibility for not doing it. If you are not free from suffering, it's on you. If you are free from suffering, it's also on you. So you have a choice.

Q: *Some people say that they cannot become arahant in this lifetime because of their kamma.*

Nm: People say that when they talk about *kamma* factually and try to use kamma that they can't even remember as an excuse for doing nothing now. Actually it wouldn't work, even if you had a memory of it – let alone if you don't have a memory of it. If that is your *kamma* from before, it is the same as a *kamma* from yesterday – what you have done yesterday, ten years ago, - all are equally your *kamma*, why stop then? You choose to draw this invisible line where your memory is – 'Oh, I don't

remember, so it's not my problem (if it somehow causes me to not become an *arahant* now.)'. You actually want to go the other way – I can't remember, thus it is a big problem and definitely my problem.

Lack of memory should make you responsible for everything. If you do something today because ten years ago you started developing a certain habit, you would not be able to deny responsibility for it, as you have a memory of it. What that means is that if you can't practice properly now because of something you did ten lifetimes ago, that still simply means that you can't practice properly because of yourself. So 'I can't become an *arahant* because of my previous *kamma*' just means 'I can't become an *arahant* because I can't become an *arahant*.' That's the reason in itself.

Q: *I think it is connected to what you mentioned before about the observances. Someone follows some practice and observance without the results…*

Nm: They would end up with an excuse that relieves them of responsibility instead of thinking 'wait, maybe I've been doing something wrong!'

No – I couldn't have been doing something wrong because it would mean my efforts have been wasted, but that is too unpleasant to admit, so instead I'll just dismiss it, I'll say 'No, I'm doing everything *right*, but I cannot get to it because of something in the past, that I have no memory of.'

If you have no memory of something, it is the same as saying it doesn't exist for you – yet that which doesn't exist for you, you have no knowledge, no memory, no perception of it, you still

take it as a presently perceived reason for your failure. You can see what a deeply rooted act of self-deception that is.

So you can wear robes throughout your whole life, yet still not even have the mundane right view. And that is nobody else's fault. You are always solely responsible for the views you hold, and nothing you do will make any difference if there is not even a mundane acceptance of responsibility and transparency in regard to your own life, your own actions.

That doesn't mean just repeating it theoretically 'yes, I'm responsible!'

It means that you must *feel* it – you must feel that existential anxiety. There is no other way around it, though you can suffer to different degrees on account of it, depending on your development of proper virtue and *samadhi*. Nonetheless, it is still the same thing that needs to be done.

Only when you start accepting this, can you realise that the practice of Dhamma is not optional; that it's not up to anyone else - any external form, method, guide or institution; and that it doesn't manage your suffering, it uproots the basis of it. In other words, it is only about oneself being free from craving, or not free from craving.

When the suffering is uprooted there is nothing to manage, thus you are free from any burden, duty, and no reason to do anything anymore. But you will not arrive at that through blindly adhering to the dependence on needing something to do.

Sīlabbataparāmāsa

That is what *sīlabbataparāmāsa* means – not rites and rituals, or things that are very obviously ridiculous when it comes to practice. 'Virtue' (sīla) and duty, sense of duty, something you need to do.

For example, one might take for granted that 'it's my duty to sit cross-legged and meditate as a monk.' – Yes, but why do you do it? Why does it help you? Do you understand why it helps you and why you are doing it? No, you are just doing it because 'it is my duty to do this, and my virtue is also my duty.'

That is a fetter. How can you abandon that fetter – *without* abandoning your virtue and without abandoning your efforts?

What differentiates it is that when it is taken as a duty, you bypass responsibility - at least a little bit. For example, a judge when sending someone to jail will not see it as *his* decision, his choice, his responsibility for putting someone in jail: 'I'm a judge, it's my duty to pass a judgement on you.' Well, you chose to be a judge, the one who sends someone to jail. You introduce a proxy to cover up the fact that it is *you* condemning people to die, or not.

One can say 'I need a job, I have to work' – and yes you do, because you have six children, resulting from things that you yourself wanted to do. But even if somebody had forced those children on you and you had to look after them, it couldn't truly be a duty. You would still be free to accept it or not.

That is the initial realisation involved in accepting responsibility: 'Oh, so I could then decide to not do it.' A whim of thought can change the direction of your whole existence. And that is very scary. No matter which way your life went and

what you invested in it, one morning you can decide to wake up and leave it all.

Having that edge constantly present freaks people out, because the mind is undeveloped and unrestrained, without a basis of proper virtue and self-control. Just a sight of that edge makes people run in terror.

So instead they just go from one authority to the next authority. Monks - when they ordain end up turning to *vinaya*, rules, their duty and so on, to the point of becoming extremely neurotic, whereby they are following and holding on to what is not even *vinaya* anymore; but some extreme, ridiculous interpretation upon interpretation. Although the rule is clear; the context is clear, everything is clear, someone can't sleep for five days because of the worry (that they might have *broken the rule*).

That is the problem - through avoiding responsibility you actually make things worse for yourself. Initially it is much more unpleasant (and difficult) to accept responsibility for your virtue and see that *I am choosing to do this*, (as opposed to just 'this is the rule.') But taking responsibility for it yourself is what will enable you to draw a line for the mind infected with doubt, tempted by Mara. You can say 'No – I will not think that, because I know exactly what is right.'

Even people who blindly adhere to rules and avoid responsibility, do know exactly what is right. But because they are projected in this third-person view of duty, something that just *must be done* that has nothing to do with me, they also keep needing the third person's confirmation that what they are doing is right. The doubt can only be settled by going around and asking people so that they tell you what you want to hear –

by reading and reading and reinterpreting until you *get* from it what you want to hear; by having everyone else around doing and keeping the same rites and rituals and techniques as you, because if they don't it will question the validity of what you do. *Everything is out there, nothing in me, nothing is my responsibility.*

That is why someone can be genuinely upset, existentially threatened, simply by someone else acting in a slightly different way, even as small as wearing their robe differently. If others don't do it then you would realise that you are responsible for assuming that 'this is what must be done'. It would bring you back onto that personal responsibility that you were trying to avoid all along, which is why you latched onto that fetter of duty and virtue in the first place.

Q: *As far as I understand,* sīlabbataparāmāsa *is basically about this attitude. So you remove that attitude, but do not abandon the sīla. You might not see any difference in the external behaviour of that person.*

Nm: Exactly, there is no Dhamma without *sīla*, but Dhamma is not the *sīla*. A *sotāpanna* doesn't abandon his *sīla* to become a *sotāpanna*, quite the opposite. But for a person who is fully projected in that third-person view of things, they can't see that. For them, if you say 'Dhamma is not *sīla*' it means 'Oh, so you mean I must not keep *sīla* then?' Removing *sīlabbataparāmāsa* would seem to imply that 'oh, so I should disrobe and go and find a wife.' No, it doesn't mean that at all. Virtue remains unchanged, but your attitude is now changed. You are no longer doing it on account of the assumed external authority, or whatever, you are doing it because you see it as a necessary

basis for discerning the phenomena of your mind, intentions, which you now understand is the way out of suffering.

Unless that responsibility is taken on for what you are doing in the first place, the wrong things you are doing and the fetters you are holding, you can never ever uproot them. You deny that as a fetter, you cannot undo that fetter because you are not seeing it.

Even when you go and practice Dhamma and become a monk, that takes you even further away from seeing it – instead you just find a niche of specific things you do now and worldly doings get replaced with 'what monks do.' Yet you are still *doing* - doing your meditation technique, doing your methods, and your duties, and you never stop and think about the contradictions that you carry throughout all that doing. The existential attitude is the same: *I must do this, because if I don't do anything I'm going to start sinking.* Even when people try to 'do nothing' they end up making it into something i.e. 'I am going to Do Nothing Now' – it just becomes another form of doing. And the most basic definition of *sīlabbataparāmāsa* is assuming that *doing certain things* will automatically cause purification or enlightenment.

Only (right) efforts to understand the nature of things contribute to enlightenment, but you will only know to what extent in hindsight. You can't quite tell at the time. Only once you get the Right view can you see (for example) 'Yes, it's all those nights I spent thinking and pondering relentlessly on the nature of my feelings, intentions, and so on'. That is the direct way to develop it, but not until you understand. That is the simile of the axe and the handle – 'oh look, it's gone, I need to

replace it! I used it all up, it's worn out, ignorance is gone.' *[SN 22.101](https://suttacentral.net/sn22.101)

You can't *do* your way out of ignorance. You can only set up the right kamma, so to speak, (renunciation, sense restraint, so on) – that provides the basis for understanding the nature of action. In the same sense, you abandon evil by establishing the good, so that you can understand both and free yourself.

But people have difficulty accepting that because it makes things much more overwhelming. First you have to accept responsibility; accept responsibility for not being a *sotāpanna* - then have to go through all that confusion of 'what do I do then?' and finally, it is hard to give up that dependence on having something to do.

Rather than go through all this, the view tends to be: 'Sure, maybe I don't have the Right view, but I've been practicing for fifteen years, surely that cannot have been a waste.' Surely it counts for something – simply because you cannot accept the possibility that it might have been wasted.

Q: *Maybe it was not wasted – maybe just a little bit more…?*

Nm: Yes, but how would you know that? Fifteen years –a little bit more. If you are honest with yourself, you realise that you do not know how, in what way, that 'little bit more' will help you. So you are just hoping, using wishful thinking, for magic to happen, to win the lottery, for you to get the Right view – it's on the same level. You would have to realise: 'actually, I don't know how what I have been doing relates to getting the right understanding, because all I have been doing is *doing* – of different kinds – I went to this teacher who told me to do that,

another teacher who told me to do this – I've now got my Own Way Of Doing Things – all on the level of depending on something to do.'

The more you invest in it, the harder it will be for you to look at it for what it is, to see that you still depend on having something to do. Having spent thousands of hours in meditation and so on, it becomes practically impossible to admit that it *might* have been a waste of time. Admitting it would equate to breakdown.

Sakkāyadiṭṭhi

Q: *So we have that first fetter,* sakkāyadiṭṭhi *(Person-view, personality view) – It is removed for a sotāpanna, but it seems that craving is still present even for someone who has removed sakkāyadiṭṭhi.*

Nm: *Sakkāyadiṭṭhi* is on the level of the view of self, *attavāda*. You can only know to what extent there is still craving for the five aggregates, when you are free from *attavāda*. A *puthujjana* can't get an accurate representation of what craving is present in a *sotāpanna* without becoming a sotāpanna; that is an important thing to keep in mind. People's minds are used to having it all laid out – 'this is what *arahant* is, this is what *sotāpanna* is' – but you have to know that if you truly understood what it is, you would be at least a *sotāpanna*.

That criteria must not be compromised, because otherwise you would end up thinking you understood these things without becoming them - which means there is no understanding of it. In order to free yourself from *attavāda*, you have to understand what *attavāda* is, and this understanding in itself (i.e. practical

discernment, not merely theoretical understanding) already frees you from *attavāda*.

And what is *attavāda*? It is assuming the sense of self externally, so to speak.

You can describe to yourself your experience as a whole, which can be called 'the five aggregates'. If something is external to it – you realise 'how could I even think of that? How could I *think* of something external to my thinking?' That is a complete contradiction in terms.

But if you become aware of the vague, ambiguous sense of self that you have, you can see that it kind of has that property (of being external, independent of or separate from your experience as a whole; i.e. it is the self that 'experiences things' or 'has the experience.') – which means, it is not actually independent, but you keep maintaining that utter, blatant discrepancy, purely because you never think about it.

Q: *How I understand it, is that Atta – is included in your experience and your experience is conditioned by external things, so to speak, so atta cannot be independent.*

Nm: The reason why what you just said is not quite accurate is that even when you have a thought of how your experience is externally conditioned – that cannot be *that external* because of which your experience is conditioned.

How can you experience that which is beyond your experience, unless you are experiencing it? If you are experiencing it, it cannot be external to your experience.

Q: *I mean external to this sense of 'me'.*

Nm: Any notion of 'external' is fundamentally internal for you already. That's how you uproot *attavāda*. Not giving it any way out, not leaving any room for that contradiction. Of course you actually have no choice in the matter, but your view doesn't think that. Any form of allowing any form of 'external to me/my experience' is allowing the basis for *attavāda* to be there. So even when you say 'my *attavāda* is conditioned by external' you already assumed 'external' independent of your experience and that is the basis for your very *attavāda* you are trying to undo.

Regardless of what kind of sense of self you might have – whether lofty, superior, inferior, far, near, it has to still be within the aggregates and when you think 'It's all within' even that thought of 'it's all within' is still within the aggregates. That contradiction cannot remain without that constant nutriment of you providing the basis for it. Stop providing the basis for it, and the nature of it will become apparent, after a period of time.

Q: *So it is to basically repeat this same process of thinking?*

Nm: You can repeat it, it will seem to all make sense in the beginning, then you might start doubting it, but then you can find a new way of getting back to it through that very doubt. Initially a new idea is so inspiring – everything makes sense. As you keep applying it, that inspiration runs away, and then you start doubting it and you don't see it anymore – that is when you have to keep pushing forward. But that is the idea, yes; developing the theme that doesn't provide the basis for any notion of external in regard to your experience as a whole.

It is not to deny it, ‘There Is No External’ – no – there is external, which is experienced by you, thought by you, conceived by you, which means that external is fundamentally internal.

Q: *I realised one thing, that you cannot make any kind of progress if you keep trying to watch the five aggregates as if from outside. Because I was trying to watch them, trying to, you know, see them as impermanent and so on…*

Nm: Your watching of the five aggregates is within the five aggregates. The fact that you keep assuming that you could ‘watch them as if from outside’, means that you still keep allowing the possibility of ‘external’ and that in itself is already wrong. It is providing the base for *attavāda*.

So you can’t simply stop *attavāda*, but you can stop maintaining this obvious contradiction of assuming the external through these little unquestioned attitudes, habits, and thoughts. You undo that to the extent necessary, there will be no room for *attavāda*. Then you can realise that, you can say in a way there is a self, but it is not yours.

> **“His very self is not his own.”**
>
> –Dhp 62

That’s another thing people say: ‘There Is No Self’. That which was taken as ‘self’ is there; it’s simply these *five aggregates*, (which should be seen as not-self). That is what the Buddha said, but people never arrive at it because their whole practice is based on a denial: ‘There is No Self’.

> **"If, Ananda, when I was asked by the wanderer Vaccagotta 'Is there a self?' I had answered 'There is a self', would this have been consistent on my part with the arising of the knowledge that 'All things are not-self'?**
>
> **'No, venerable sir.'**
>
> **'And if, when I was asked by him, 'Is there no self' I had answered 'There is no self' the wanderer Vaccagotta, already confused, would have fallen into even greater confusion, thinking, 'It seems the self I had before, now is not there."**
>
> – SN 44.10

So already there is the external view of my aggregates as per modern science and so on; and then this is extended even further with another layer of wrong view 'there is no self.' A denial upon a denial. All of it is assumed externally which means that you are through and through *attavāda*.

First you need to admit that there is that sense of self, then stop putting it first; stop putting it external to the experience as a whole, see it within it. Change the order, that is all you need to do.

> **"It is as if he were putting upright what had been overturned, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or lighting a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see sights – in this way, Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear to us in many ways."**

– MN 41 (for example).

You can take that in a poetic sense, or in a very literal sense. It is not to discover new things, but cease perverting the order, messing them up.

And now somebody can think, 'oh yes, I get it, I get it!' Great – but now develop that theme, day and night. Don't abandon it. It doesn't matter whatever else is going on in your life, don't abandon the theme that your sense of self can *never* be external – including your very thought of external. You will be literally sucking out the oxygen that is necessary for that sense of self to keep enduring in that external manner. There is no basis for it – and if you stop ignoring the fact that there is no basis for it, it cannot be maintained.

There is nothing mystical about it. But there is nothing scientific about it either; science is already the wrong view. You need instruction to know what you need to look for, but now you also need to start discerning it in your own experience. If now you go with it as your view, or make a mantra out of it and mechanically think about the concept or repeat it, you're not going to be uprooting anything.

Q: *Does* sotāpanna *have suffering?*

Nm: From an arahant's point of view yes, from puthujjana's point of view, no.

Knowing the way out of suffering means that you can't suffer. And that's what *sotāpanna* knows; he knows the way out of suffering. If *puthujjana* doesn't accept that as a criteria, he will think he knows what *sotāpanna* is, while still being a

puthujjana. And that is a contradiction in terms – the only way to know what a *sotāpanna* is, is to become one.

Q: *What is that suffering which from the point of view of an* arahant *is in* sotāpanna *?*

Nm: Symptoms of the illness that linger, while the illness has been cured. Nuisance. Imagine you were dying of cancer, so your joints ache, your lymph nodes are swollen, everything is unpleasant. But really you mentally suffer because you know you are dying of cancer. Now I come as a doctor and I cure your cancer. But now your joints still hurt, your lymph nodes are still swollen, you still don't have hair – but you know you are free from cancer. You would be quite joyous actually, you wouldn't mind any of this discomfort. From the point of view of someone who is free even from those lingering symptoms of cancer, yes, you can say that is some sort of suffering. Not from the point of view of someone who is still in sheer terror of dying of cancer – who is not even bothered by his symptoms in themselves. His real bother is the fact that he is dying of cancer. When you uproot that, the symptoms would bother you even less. That is why *sotāpanna* can turn away and go back to a worldly life and still engage in sensuality. You have uprooted the illness completely and you fully understand that – it's not like 'oh what is happening to me?' You know exactly what is happening. No amount of symptoms can re-introduce the illness.

Q: *He still doesn't have the full understanding?*

Nm: He has full understanding but has not dwelt in the theme of full understanding long enough. In the same sense that I just described, how to uproot *attavāda* - you can't just think about that theme once or twice, you have to keep discerning it and

dwell in it until the handle of the axe wears out. You don't know when that is. For *sotāpanna* it is even clearer than that, because he knows exactly what to think and what themes to develop; he just needs to do it. That is why the Buddha kept encouraging a sense of urgency in them.

71hh- Ajahn Chah and the Original Mind

Ven. Thaniyo: This is another talk by Ajahn Chah called “The Path to Peace.” Now, this is just a few paragraphs from it that I found interesting. In this talk, Ajahn Chah gives a complete outline of the practice. It’s about the middle of the talk that I’ll begin from:

> **“At a certain point in the practice, you see that it is the mind which gives orders to the body. The body has to depend on the mind before it can function. However, the mind itself is constantly subject to different objects contacting and conditioning it before it can have any effect on the body. As you continue to turn attention inwards and reflect on the Dhamma, the wisdom faculty gradually matures, and eventually, you are left contemplating the mind and mind-objects, which means that you start to experience the body, rūpadhamma, as arūpadhamma, formless. Through your insight, you’re no longer uncertain in your understanding of the body and the way it is. The mind experiences the body’s physical characteristics as arūpadhamma or formless objects, which come into contact with the mind. Ultimately, you’re contemplating just the mind and mind-objects—those objects which come into your consciousness. Now, examining the true nature of the mind, you can observe that in its natural state, it has no preoccupations or issues prevailing upon it. It’s like a piece of cloth or a flag that has been tied to the end of a pole—as long as it’s on its**

own and undisturbed, nothing will happen to it. A leaf on a tree is another example. Ordinarily, it remains quiet and unperturbed. If it moves or flutters, this must be due to the wind, an external force. Normally, nothing much happens to leaves—they remain still. They don't go looking to get involved with anything or anybody. When they start to move, it must be due to the influence of something external, such as the wind, which makes them swing back and forth. It's a natural state. The mind is the same. In it, there exists no loving or hating, nor does it seek to blame other people. It is independent, existing in a state of purity that is truly clear, radiant and untarnished. In its pure state, the mind is peaceful, without happiness or suffering—indeed, not experiencing any feeling at all. This is the true state of the mind."

Ven. Nyanamoli: That's nothing other than seeing things arise as phenomena, appear as phenomena, which they already are, because phenomena, i.e. dhammā, are the objects of the mind, of mano, as a sense. Most people in their day-to-day life don't even see that because they're too absorbed with the sense world, and usually, that then results in all the views as well. That's why it's so common to have the assumption of the external public world that "we inhabit"—the world that is independent of our experience, the "material" world; but you fail to see that even your assumption of "material" is actually a phenomenon arisen on the level of your thought, on the level of the dhammā, on the level of the image in your mind. And that's usually how people go about in their day-to-day life: not even seeing the mind, the field where these phenomena appear. So

they've no signs of it, no recognition of it. So then everything revolves around the assumptions of the material world, interpretations based on that and so on.

Again, in itself, it's still on the level of phenomena, but the only difference is the person's completely unaware of it; but a person can become aware of it. So once you start recognizing that your own body—no matter how material it is or how material it might "feel"—it still can only be known as such because it has arisen on the level of that mind. And in that sense, you realize "This, in a way, has nothing to do with this matter that I'm thinking of, this matter that I assume; it's the opposite way: the matter that I think of and assume is only intelligible because the thing is still there in the level of that mind as a phenomenon," and that's what Ajahn Chah referred to as arūpa, non-material. But even a material thing is known as such only because that phenomenon has arisen on the level of your mind, which is non-material. So that's what he meant when he said the mind is the one that governs and precedes these things structurally.

A person now might start thinking: "So I must find the immaterial" or something like that. The arūpa that Ajahn Chah refers to—the phenomenal nature of things—is within the material that you're perceiving. It's not that you must abandon or deny or get rid of the material or stop thinking it in order to see the immaterial: you just have to discern it properly whereby you know that the arisen experience of the material body right here, right now, is an image in your mind already. And that's these two tiers of existence, so to speak. Two domains: the simultaneous presence of the material domain and the mental domain. Material is inconceivable without the

mental designation of it—without the mental phenomenon being there simultaneously present; but, in the same manner, there would be nothing present as a phenomenon on the level of the mental domain if the actual physical rūpa is not there, still alive. So nāmarūpa determines viññana, and viññana determines nāmarūpa to the same extent, like the simile of the two reeds supporting each other: you can't separate them, you can't investigate them independent of each other—one implies the other. That's just how it works. But in practical terms, the way the experience proliferates, with lack of sense restraint, sensuality and views, you drift away from that phenomenal side of things that's simultaneously there: you drift away from your mind. That's why the Buddha said it's hard to see the mind correctly for what it is. That's why it's a prerequisite for sotāpatti—seeing the signs of your mind, seeing the domain of the phenomenal, phenomenological, whatever you want to call it—because for most people that's completely overlooked.

Ven. Thaniyo: Do they go directly into the senses?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Yes. Usually, the entire attention gets absorbed, even if you don't necessarily proliferate it or are not wild and unrestrained—just naturally—not discerning your mind means automatically over-discerning that which comes from the senses, which then influences all the views that you have on account of it, which is the public material world independent of my experience, science, scientific measure and data as the objective value. Again, independent of your experience, failing to see that you cannot even conceive those things unless they are your experience.

Ven. Thaniyo: For example, thinking: “When I die, this world will continue.”

Ven. Nyanamoli: Exactly. All the wrong views can be boiled down to the two fundamental points: “when I die the world will continue” or “when I die I will continue, not the world.” Either way, it’s this external projection of your experience as a whole, which is wrong, not because some higher authority told you it is, but because it’s a contradiction in terms. How can you even know something external of your experience if that’s not already experienced? Which means, then, it’s not external to your experience.

Parts of your experience present themselves based on your ignorance as if they were independent of your experience, but you’re experiencing it, and that’s a contradiction in terms. That’s why attavāda is one of the first contradictions to go when you get the Right View: the assumption of the external sense of self, independent of this experience. And that will go when you realize that no matter how external it might feel, it’s still experienced, which means it’s still internal in that manner. So it doesn’t matter how material, how objective it is: the notion of objectivity, the notion of materiality is on the level of the phenomenon persisting in your mind that gives it it’s meaning. That’s why things are significant and determined by the mind. That’s why the mind is the forerunner—as the Buddha would say in the Dhammapada (verse 1 and 2)—the forerunner of all things: without the mind giving it’s determination to these things, there would be no experience; but now if you say “it’s all in the mind”, that’s not true either because that mind wouldn’t be there mirroring the phenomena if the matter is not there to

be mirrored in the first place, if the four great elements are not there.

Ven. Thaniyo: And it shows that inaccessibility of that matter to you.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Exactly. The only way you can access it is the indirect experience of it, which is not it, it exists because of it.

Ven. Thaniyo: And that's anicca?

Ven. Nyanamoli: Exactly. That's why the Mūlapariyāya Sutta (MN 1) talks about that conceiving: "He conceives in matter,… apart from matter,…. thinks matter is mine," and so on. He develops all these attitudes towards that which is matter, failing to see that he can only experience his experience of matter, not the matter—so his perception can only perceive perception, his feeling can only feel feelings, his intentions can only intend intentions—because assuming that you're perceiving the genuine rūpa means you are actually accessing that external world of the four mahābhūta (the four great elements) and that's inconceivable. Hence, the slightest of those assumptions as described in the Mūlapariyāya Sutta means that there is a conceiving of "I am." There is a conceiving of a separate entity that's independent and objective from the experience as a whole. That's why the Buddha referred to the four great elements, saying: "they cease to find footing"—they don't cease to be wherever they are, but they stop finding footing in your experience. As in you stop conflating the perception that has arisen on account of the four great elements being there with the perception of the actual four great elements; but see, now, when you think: "Oh, so the four great elements are something different", that's also your perception on the level of your

thought. So by no means of grasping—by your thought, by your intentions—can you actually ever enter the domain of the four great elements. So you realize all you have to do is stop misconceiving it. That's how it will stop finding the footing, not by finding it where it is and removing it and so on: just stop making the mistake of thinking that you can relate to it. And you will keep making the mistake of relating to it for as long as you hold your sense of self dearly because the relations with the world are the direct result and also direct fuel for the sense of self.

So, if you're willing to let go of that sense of self, you will then have no reason to keep maintaining this gratuitous assumption of the world external to you because the only reason you do that maintenance is that that's how you maintain your sense of self.

Ven. Thaniyo: What about, as Ajahn Chah is saying, "the state of the mind"?

Ven. Nyanamoli: If you start recognizing that no amount of materiality or objectivity can be found elsewhere except on the basis of the mind, you realize the mind is the gateway—it doesn't matter what comes your way through your senses, good or bad, threatening or agreeable and friendly—the mind is the basis, and in itself, on that basis of the mind, things are quite indifferent. It's your own attitude, then, towards what comes through the mind, by not seeing that you want to deal with it, prevent it, want more of it, indulge in sensuality, engage in ill-will: because you don't see that you don't need to go and chase these things out there; because even the assumption of "out there" can only be known as such on the level of the

phenomenon of your mind, which means, you realize: “What if I just know it as a persisting, enduring phenomenon right here, right now? I don’t need to go anywhere, I just stay with this framework.” And then there will be no overly delighting or trying to deny it to get rid of it, which means equanimity will be a natural result.

Ven. Thaniyo: That’s what is there anyway, without “you”.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Absolutely. The mind and the body are there without “you”. They don’t need your sense of self. So that’s why you can develop equanimity. Because things, in themselves, are equanimous: they’re indifferent to you. It’s your own passion and confusion—and passion that comes out of that confusion—that confuses that whole thing; but if you stop fueling that passion, confusion disappears, which means, then, equanimity is restored because all you have is things that have arisen and persist, and that’s it. It has nothing to do with you.

Ven. Thaniyo: I’ll continue with Ajahn Chah’s talk, “The Path to Peace.” He continues:

> **“The purpose of practice, then, is to seek inwardly, searching and investigating until you reach the Original Mind. The Original Mind is also known as the Pure Mind. The Pure Mind is the mind without attachment.”**

Ven. Nyanamoli: That’s what I just said. You find the phenomena there, and you realize the phenomena, the way they have arisen in that mind, are already indifferent, already non-polluted by passion and lust, and they can’t really be polluted. Your actions can be polluted by desire and lust, but the

persisting phenomenon is still the way it has arisen, which means it's impenetrable to your assumptions, your cravings, your attachments. That's why it needs constant maintenance: it can never really get settled in these things that you're attached to or trying to get rid of or whatever, it's only an attitude in regard to it; but the thing in itself remains completely indifferent. So you recognize that that true indifference, true equanimity comes from the things—the way they have arisen—and you have no say, even if you want to have a say.

Ven. Thaniyo: That's the original state.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Exactly. And then you realize: "Things were always like this, in a way. It was because I did not know that they were this way that I kept assuming them to be different."

Ven. Thaniyo: Ajahn Chah said further:

> **"The Pure Mind is the mind without attachment. It doesn't get affected by mind-objects. In other words, it doesn't chase after the different kinds of pleasant and unpleasant mind-objects. Rather, the mind is in a state of continuous knowing and wakefulness, thoroughly mindful of all it's experiencing. When the mind is like this, no pleasant or unpleasant mind-objects it experiences will be able to disturb it. The mind doesn't become anything. In other words, nothing can shake it. Why? Because there is awareness. The mind knows itself as pure. It has evolved its own true independence, has reached its original state. How is it able to bring this original state into existence? Through the faculty of mindfulness wisely reflecting and seeing that all**

things are merely conditions arising out of the influence of elements, without any individual being controlling them."

Ven. Nyanamoli: The mind gives the meaning, gives the significance, simultaneously, to the present material domain; but without the material domain, there would be nothing manifesting in the mind. It's the two reeds simile holding each other: it's the "dyad", as the Buddha referred to it. And that's the experience as a whole, back and front. That's it. Wherever you look, it's within these two bases that are mutually determined.

There is no room for your sense of self, for your ownership, for your mastery. Or rather, your sense of ownership, as it is now, is within that, which means it's determined by that basis independent of your sense of self. And the sense of self, that's not in your own control… Well, that's not your self, then, is it? Because sense of self implicitly declares ownership, mastery over experience. That's why it's my self, my own self. So you realize that your own self depends upon this basis that you've no say in, and that's how your own self is not yours. You realize the basis that's not my self, that cannot be my self, determines this sense of self, and it's, because of that, not my self. You actually learn how to perceive not-self with not-self, and that's what the Buddha was talking about in those various Suttas.

When Ajahn Chah talks about the "Original Mind", again, you can mystify that: you can think "Oh, it's this pure bright mind that you just have to tap into." No, the "Original Mind" is right in front of you where your thoughts are, where these appearances are. The way things arise, you realize they have arisen on their own to that extent, and you've no say in that.

And that is that “originality” of it: it’s not your mastery, your creation of those same things. You realize you can only appropriate things to be “mine” because they were given beforehand: they’ve arisen on their own so you appropriate them. You realize you can’t even create anything in that sense; but it’s not like a delay—it’s not like things have arisen and then you don’t see them—it’s the simultaneous presence of these things enduring and your ownership of that endurance, but you want to realize that that endurance cannot be owned, that’s why you stop owning things. You can’t stop owning things by trying to destroy them, get rid of them and say no to everything: you can stop owning them by realizing that your ownership cannot belong to you. Hence, it’s not ultimate ownership.

That is the “Original”, the “Pure Mind”, as Ajahn Chah said, that there is no room for anyone there, in a way, means exactly that: inasmuch as the mind gives a significance and recognition—it allows matter to manifest on its basis—to that same extent without that matter, there would be nothing for the mind to discern; so the matter is the measure of the extent of the mind, and the mind determines the extent of the appeared matter, and whichever way you look, it’s going to be determined by the other. So “I am independent of this” becomes inconceivable to even assume, but in order to see this correctly, a person has to stop just focusing on things in front of them because these two levels I talk about, that Ajahn Chah talks about, they’re not in front of you as two objects. Only one can be in front of you. The other one is always behind from where you look, and that’s what we spoke about in other talks: “the peripheral.”

Learning how to see things peripherally without directly looking at them because that’s where the mind is, that’s where

phenomena are. But what you see in front of you is the objects of your senses. That's why people are naturally, with the grain, automatically absorbed with the world and senses and chasing pleasures: it actually takes effort to learn how to see the context behind it, how to develop that peripheral vision without needing to turn away and look at it because it won't be peripheral then. Like, I'm looking at you now, and I've all these things peripheral to me, and they will remain peripheral if I keep looking at you, but if I start looking at that… Well, that's not peripheral anymore. Now that's the actual thing right in front of me. And that's the point that you must keep in mind when you try to discern what Ajahn Chah's describing here. Rūpa is what you're staring at, arūpa would be everything around it. You want to learn how to see arūpa as arūpa; you want to see the peripheral as peripheral.

By the way, rūpa and arūpa are not quite used in this sense in the Suttas, but Ajahn Chah used it on a practical level, and there's nothing wrong with that.

Ven. Thaniyo: So I'll continue with the talk:

> **"This is how it is with the happiness and suffering we experience. When these mental states arise, they're just happiness and suffering. There's no owner of the happiness. The mind is not the owner of the suffering—mental states do not belong to the mind. Look at it for yourself. In reality, these are not affairs of the mind, they're separate and distinct. Happiness is just the state of happiness; suffering is just the state of suffering."**

Ven. Nyanamoli: Any phenomenon is a phenomenon in itself; that's why it's independent of you. That's why the Suttas say: "He knows the mind affected with lust as mind affected with lust." It's not like "me affected with lust." There is lust present; there is non-lust present. There is happiness present; there is sadness present. It's enduring inasmuch as sights are enduring, sounds are enduring and so on. Anything that manifests, that is its nature: to be manifested. That's it. So even if it's a weird, ambiguous thought, it's real as such: as the experience of an ambiguous thought. But it's our own expectation of "concreteness" which is fueled by that assumption of "material, public concreteness", so to speak, —the world independent of me— that prevents you from seeing the mind, seeing the phenomena, seeing the Dhamma. That's why dhammā means, literally, "phenomena". And then the Dhamma is the teaching of the knowledge of the phenomena, of that which manifests.

Ven. Thaniyo: It's right there.

Ven. Nyanamoli: Yes, it cannot be anywhere else. So it's learning how to see it correctly.

Ven. Thaniyo: Ajahn Chah says:

> **"You are merely the knower of these things. In the past, because the roots of greed, hatred, and delusion already existed in the mind, whenever you caught sight of the slightest pleasant or unpleasant mind-object, the mind would react immediately—you would take hold of it and have to experience either happiness or suffering. You would be continuously indulging in states of happiness and suffering. That's the way it is as long as the mind**

doesn’t know itself—as long as it’s not bright and illuminated. The mind is not free. It is influenced by whatever mind-objects it experiences. In other words, it is without a refuge, unable to truly depend on itself. You receive a pleasant mental impression and get into a good mood. The mind forgets itself. In contrast, the original mind is beyond good and bad. This is the original nature of the mind. If you feel happy over experiencing a pleasant mind-object, that is delusion. If you feel unhappy over experiencing an unpleasant mind-object, that is delusion. Unpleasant mind-objects make you suffer and pleasant ones make you happy—this is the world. Mind-objects come with the world. They are the world. They give rise to happiness and suffering, good and evil, and everything that is subject to impermanence and uncertainty. When you separate from the original mind, everything becomes uncertain—there is just unending birth and death, uncertainty and apprehensiveness, suffering and hardship.”

Ven. Nyanamoli: Yes, and you’re separated from the “Original Mind”—you’re separated from that domain of phenomena, you don’t see them as phenomena—when you never restrain your actions in regard to your senses. The threshold of the being you are used to is on the level of the senses and the pleasure or pain that comes from it. That’s why many people would have the implicit attitude that even their own thoughts don’t really exist, are not real: because the expectation of reality has been proliferated so far out.

Going back to that “Original Mind”, as Ajahn Chah says, is not some hidden reality behind all these appearances: it’s actually stopping to misconceive the appearances for what they’re not, and that is its original state. It was always there. That’s why arahantship is possible in the first place. That’s why undoing of the wrong conceiving is possible: because these things are truly independent of whether you conceive them or not. So that’s why the sense of self is a problem: because it’s a contradiction in terms. “Self” means mastery, ownership, rulership of your experience. Yet you can only rule that which was given to you beforehand, which means you’re not the ruler then because if you were the true creator, master, ruler of these things, you would have been creating it, you would have been truly independent of it. But your whole existence depends on these things still being there so that you can maintain your ownership in regard to it; but when that thing decides to go, and it will—that’s why the Buddha encouraged reflecting on the four great elements, how they change—you realize it’s inconceivable that you would still exist in your domain of ownership. So, that’s not ownership then, and you realize the only way to maintain that sense of ownership of things around you is to ignore the fact that you cannot actually own it. That’s why people don’t want to think about death naturally—don’t want to think about losing their loved ones, losing things they care about—because it’s implicit that it will happen, so it just reminds them of the obvious. So you stop being ignorant by making an effort to not ignore things. That’s it. Because ignoring things is effortless. It’s with the grain of sensuality, the grain of ignorance; not ignoring takes effort. But not ignoring is not like “resolving some mystery of the universe.” You just need to stop ignoring the very things that are in front of you: stop ignoring the broader context; stop ignoring the peripheral to the actual;

stop trying to get rid of the states of mind you don't like or that "should have not arisen."

Ven. Thaniyo: You can just look at "mind-objects."

Ven. Nyanamoli: Yes. That's what we do when we do the questioning, asking: "How am I feeling right now, fundamentally? Is it OK or is it not OK?" And you realize you find that a state there enduring, and you have no say in it. You may have lots of joy now because you feel OK, or you have a bit of a pressure and unpleasant feeling because you don't feel OK, but that fundamental bit of whether it's OK or not OK has arisen on its own. Feeling has been manifested to its own extent, and you have no say in that. That's why I compare it to the weather that comes and goes. You will act differently when the weather's bad, you'll act differently when the weather's good. In the same way, you'll act differently when there is a pleasant feeling than when there is an unpleasant feeling, but that in itself is not necessarily the problem until your actions delude you into believing that they are the controller of the weather: they are the controller of the feelings. And that's why the Buddha would ask that person in that Sutta: "Well, if the feeling is truly yours (as in you're the controller), which one is it then?" because they keep coming and going. Good feelings, bad feelings, neutral feelings, but if you were truly the owner, you would only have good feelings because ownership and pleasure go hand in hand. That's why you want to undermine that pleasure, not by trying to get rid of it, but seeing that it cannot actually be yours—it hasn't come from you. That's how you also undermine the ownership.

83hh- Don’t Be Faithful to Ignorance

Thaniyo: I was wondering if we could speak about lying, the phenomenon of lying, the choice to lie. A simple question: Is it wrong to lie? Where can we go with that?

Nyanamoli: It is. So now you may ask why is it wrong to lie? Don’t just take it as true because an authority ‘declared’ that lying is wrong and now you must obey that. Yes, lying is wrong, but you want to investigate why it is wrong. So, what’s the first, most obvious thing that shows itself if you start to investigate why lying would be wrong? What is lying?

Thaniyo: Dishonesty.

Nyanamoli: OK, so dishonesty, lying, concealing. What do all those things have in common?

Thaniyo: The person not wanting something to be known.

Nyanamoli: Exactly, which means there is something, but you want it to be different. So, in its nature, it’s a discrepancy, a contradiction—two opposing things: one is the truth, the other is what you would prefer it to be.

But the problem with lying is—phenomenologically speaking, from the point of view of a person who practices mindfulness and tries to develop wisdom—that you cannot deny the truth without giving importance to your point of view over the truth. That’s why lying is practically wrong—lying is practically an obstacle for developing wisdom. If you could, say, theoretically, lie without perverting that existential order of truth and your

point of view, then lying would not be unwholesome. But it is impossible to engage in an act of lying without implicitly, immediately fueling the wrong order, whereby it's my point of view, my preference that comes first—truth is second.

When I say truth, I mean factual presence of a self-arisen phenomenon, and that's the key here—it's not like 'the Truth', as in there is 'a lie' and then there is 'the Truth'. Denying whatever truth is at the time by serving a lie, means you're also implicitly overriding the most self-evident, basic nature of the arisen experience—that it comes first, structurally. Your point of view is structurally second. So, by engaging in a lie, you're engaging in a perversion of that order. That's why even a little lie is as bad as a big lie—from the point of view of the mind that wants to practice—because practice means undoing any perversion to the existential order of the five aggregates.

In the same sense, you cannot engage in a sensual act without sensual perceptions being implied, and sensual perceptions are sensual distortions. In other words, you can't engage in sensuality without being distorted by sensuality at the same time—without fueling the already persisting distortion of sensual perception. Likewise, you can't engage in a lie without fueling the existential distortion of the arisen phenomena, the truth—the self-evident arising of whatever's present. It's recognizing that that arisen experience is there on its own, which means my attitude and my actions concerning it are only because this thing allows my actions to be a possibility.

For example, if there is no unpleasant feeling manifested, would you even be able to conceive acting out of an unpleasant feeling, to try to get rid of it? You wouldn't. Or, on a less

fundamental level, if you take some experience, for example, you have to go to work. That's your arisen situation that persists and has its significance—things you have to do, reasons why you have to do them. You need to earn money, you need to provide things, etc. That's your factual situation. On account of it, you'll be acting left and right and deciding. But when you start engaging in an act of lying, you're overriding that very order. That doesn't mean you can change the order—there are still things arisen on their own— but you are fully gratuitously giving priority to your point of view, which in itself, at that time, is based on ignoring what the real order is. In other words, you start lying about having to go to work—lying to yourself, not even lying to others—you start saying to yourself that you don't need to go to work, because really you don't want to go to work. You start lying because the arisen thing is unbearable, or not necessarily unbearable, but it's unpleasant and you don't want to have to deal with it. That's why another aspect of an act of lying is that it's always rooted in avoiding displeasure—why else would you be lying? Unless you yourself perceive that, if you don't admit the truth, you will avoid that displeasure, the pain of that truth. But can you really avoid the pain through looking elsewhere? You can't. You're only acting out of it.

Thaniyo: You're looking elsewhere because it's there.

Nyanamoli: Exactly. But the fact that you engaged in an act of lying means you do have—or you had it before, and now you're maintaining—the belief that you can avoid the arisen pressure of the truth, the displeasure of the truth, simply by lying. Which then implies that you can avoid, existentially, arisen phenomena simply by providing another phenomenon.

The act of lying is fundamentally rooted in a wrong-view—that's why it's fundamentally unwholesome. And it's the same with any of the precepts that the Buddha laid out—none of them are universally given 'Commandments'. All of them are rooted in the principle of greed, aversion and delusion—which separately are all also principles of some form of contradicting the arisen nature of experience—which is why it's unwholesome to break them. They're not unwholesome because it's a universal morality—they're unwholesome because they go against how things have arisen. And that's how you can know for yourself that they're unwholesome—once you understand the nature of things as they have arisen. Then you have a criterion for what's skillful and what's unskillful—what's wholesome and what's unwholesome.

That's why lying is always wrong—it always goes against the nature of an arisen thing, whatever that thing is. So, the example we gave: you don't want to go and do this particular work. Now you can admit that. You don't have to lie to yourself, but that means now you have to take responsibility for the displeasure you're feeling. You realize "The work needs to be done, but I choose not to do it". Which means all the reasons that were making you do this work—supporting your family, earning money, whatever else was the motivation for working—you're now responsible for not meeting any of those requirements. And when, down the line, circumstances remind you of that—your family starts asking for money, or you get sick and you can't pay for your treatment and so on—it's because you chose not to do this particular work, so you're responsible for that. This future misfortune, that came as a result of not being able to look after yourself, is because you chose not to look after yourself. There's nothing wrong with that—you have

every right to choose not to, but that means you must take responsibility for what comes out of it. But now that means that, by trying to avoid the responsibility of doing your duty, you're actually paying the price, which is even worse. Now you can't provide for your family, you don't have enough money for this or for that, for food… and that's on you. A result of your choice to avoid the work. And that's very unpleasant—you have to admit that it's on you— and it can endure for weeks, months —for as long as you don't get out of that situation. But it's still a responsible thing to do – to admit the weight of your choices.

But it's way too easy to not admit it, if only you find another reason for not doing the work, apart from you not wanting to do it. And that's the nature of bad faith in existential philosophy, which is like lying, but not quite, because you're not necessarily fully self-aware of the truth, because it's that very truth you're trying to cover up from yourself.

Now, if you say that you couldn't work because of such and such reason—because it was raining for example— it's not "I couldn't work because I chose rain to be the reason for my not working," but it's "It was raining, so I couldn't work," which means now, when you don't have enough money, it's the weather's fault. So, you bypass responsibility for not working at that time, and consequently for all the future results of not working, because it's not on you.

That's why for people it's always the easiest thing to blame another, or to blame circumstances—that's the inauthentic attitude we speak about often—because, unless you take responsibility on that fundamental level, you'll never have a basis for Dhamma to apply, and the fundamental responsibility

is suffering. Again, you don't want to work because it's unpleasant—you don't want to accept future responsibility for the consequences of not working, because it's unpleasant. So fundamentally, you don't want to suffer, and you keep avoiding displeasure as the only means of dealing with suffering that you know. But it doesn't deal with it—evading suffering can only be done because suffering has arisen—that's the truth. Displeasure is manifested, and you're liable to future manifestations of displeasure. That's the truth that you will never understand, because all your actions revolve around avoiding that very truth. And then lying to other people is just an extension of this very principle.

You can't undo that principle—when lying to yourself—unless you stop habitually lying to other people. But ceasing to lie to other people doesn't necessarily mean you will automatically undo lying to yourself. That takes a further effort, but that further effort is only possible on the basis of the first effort of stopping lying to others. Stop maintaining, proliferating that wrong order of things through your act of lying to others, so you reduce it a bit—and then you will be able to stop lying to yourself as well, and that's how you can accept responsibility.

And suffering, as I said, is the fundamental responsibility. See, you can say "I suffer because he said this," or "I suffer because I didn't get enough," or "I suffer because I lost my family", or something like that. If suffering were truly rooted in those things, you wouldn't be able to free yourself from it. But, as the Buddha himself understood and then taught to others, it fortunately isn't rooted in those things—it's rooted in your resistance to the disagreeable things that come your way, and these are two different things. But, for as long as your actions

maintain the view that it's in the things—in what he said, or she said, or what I had, what I lost—you will never take responsibility for suffering, for your resistance to the disagreeable experience. And because of that, you will always remain affected by the disagreeable experience. So, the only way to stop resisting the disagreeable experience is to take responsibility for the disagreeable experience.

Thaniyo: Don't lie to yourself.

Nyanamoli: Don't lie to yourself, and consequently you won't be lying to others. That's why an arahant cannot lie. He became incapable of lying to himself—where the problem is—because he solved the problem. But in order to not lie to yourself, you have to stop habitually lying to others.

Thaniyo: What about the common 'white lies'?

Nyanamoli: They're not as bad, but you have to be strict and you've got to see—does it partake in the principle of lying, the principle you're trying to undo? The principle of perverting the order of existence, putting the blame where the blame isn't. And if you look at the white lies, then you realize they're still perverting that order. Why would you tell a white lie? Because you don't want discomfort. Why don't you want discomfort? Because you're blaming the discomfort for pain, which means by not wanting discomfort, you're avoiding responsibility for resisting the discomfort, and blaming the discomfort for your suffering, thinking "I'll just quickly tell a white lie so I don't get discomfort, which means I won't suffer." No, you don't suffer when you don't resist—it's not that you don't suffer when there is no discomfort. An arahant has discomfort, but he has no suffering. That's why white lies are bad.

Thaniyo: And if you could save somebody from suffering in the future by lying? Like if you were asked “Where is this person hiding?” when you know these people are looking for this person to harm or even kill them?

Nyanamoli: Well, on a most fundamental level, the reasons for your actions are always selfish—it cannot be otherwise. You choose to help others because that’s what’s going to make you happy, or you choose to help others because that’s how you’re going to avoid personal discomfort. Others are always secondary.

The only way to go about this is to accept it, and then stop perverting the order, as we just spoke about. Stop blaming the circumstances for your suffering and recognize that it’s in your resisting the circumstances—that’s where suffering is rooted. When you’re hiding a fugitive or something, and then you lie to others and say “No, I don’t know where that person is,” then you’re maybe saving their life—if that’s at stake. But what you’re really acting out of is your being responsible for choosing to have them in the first place. And then secondly, not wanting to experience the discomfort of responsibility because, if you say the truth, they’ll find that person, and then things might happen to the person. You will be unable to not blame yourself, and blaming yourself is unpleasant. Really you just want to prevent circumstances from allowing you to engage in self-blaming, that’s it. You’re doing it for yourself.

That’s why the Buddha said in the Suttas “If a person who is truthful to himself and truthful to others is questioned by kings or authorities thus, ‘Have you seen this?’ he would say, ‘Yes, I’ve seen it’. If he hasn’t seen it, he would say, ‘No, I haven’t seen it.’

He won't say one or the other for no one's sake—he'll say the truth." Why? Because when you say the truth, if these people that are chasing the fugitive choose to do certain things to that fugitive, that's not on you, even if you say "Yes, he went into that house". It's not on you what they choose to do with him, or why, or to what extent. Your role is not to pervert the existential order from your point of view because, by doing so, you're giving priority to your point of view, which means it's a slippery slope.

If you act out of avoiding discomfort, that means you're going to be acting out of prolonging pleasure i.e. out of conceit, out of delusion. And those are the reasons for your own suffering, not the circumstances you've been subjected to. Practically, through trying to avoid suffering, you end up making yourself more and more liable for suffering, on that existential level. Hence, no lying, no stealing, no cheating, no killing. That's not negotiable because, without that basis, you cannot overcome the attitude of avoiding responsibility for your own existence and for your own suffering. You just can't, even if you want to.

Thaniyo: It's a major offence for a monk if he lies about having attained a superior state, if he lies about his wisdom. Why is that?

Nyanamoli: Well, because of the consequences of it, the results of the action, that's why.

Thaniyo: People take what you say as truth.

Nyanamoli: Well, exactly. It can spread for generations, and people will then be acting as if it were the truth, while in reality it isn't the truth. In other words, as the Buddha described in

some other Suttas, giving to an enlightened being—making an offering to somebody who is factually awakened, free from suffering—is the greatest merit. So, if word gets out that so and so is factually free from suffering—he's an arahant—then most people will think "I'll quickly go and make some merit, because giving to that person is going to give much more merit than giving to anybody else who isn't enlightened." If that's the truth, they will actually get all those results, that great merit, because the person is factually an arahant. But say somebody spreads a lie that he's an arahant and nobody knows it's a lie, and then people go out of their way, and they don't give to others because they want to give to this arahant, but in reality he isn't an arahant. So that whole mess was created because somebody lied that that person is an arahant. As a direct result of that lie, many people have been misguided and they've been acting as if that person's an arahant, being sure they're going to get all this merit, dedicating all their offerings to that person because he's an arahant, and then it turns out he isn't. So they've been deceived directly as a result of that lie, which means the person who lied is going to be responsible for that mass deception which, as I said, can last for generations. That's why it's bad.

Thaniyo: You could say that a monk could be deceiving himself, which then deceives others.

Nyanamoli: Yes, but that's different. That's why it's not an offence if a monk does that out of overestimation. That's what I meant when I said that lying to others is not quite on the same level as lying to yourself, because lying to yourself means obscuring the truth. So simply by obscuring the truth, you're lying to yourself. But when you lie to others, it means you're

fully aware of what truth is being obscured, and then you act completely the opposite way—so it's an extra layer.

That's why the attitude of bad faith—avoiding responsibility—is not as fully-fledged as lying to another person because, in order to lie, you need to know what the truth is. You can't lie if what you think you're saying is the truth. But when it comes to yourself, it's not that clear-cut, because you're already refusing to admit what the truth is—to be fully aware of what the truth is— which means you can't fully lie to yourself. Because in order to do so, you'd need to fully admit the truth to yourself. So lying to yourself is not on the level of actually lying to yourself, but it's on the level of repressing, turning away, ignoring the truth. That's why avijjā is ignorance. It's not a metaphysical lack of information of what the universe is—it's ignoring what's right in front of you. And lying to others comes on the basis of that principle—it's just further proliferated.

Thaniyo: And then there's the sustaining of the thing that you're lying about. Someone said, "Lying is the life-blood of addiction."

Nyanamoli: Sure, but you could say that the life-blood of lying is avoiding responsibility for your own experience. Fundamentally, the basis for lying is the attitude of bad faith to yourself, as in having faith in ignoring, not in what you're actually ignoring. That's what I mean: you pervert the order. The only way you can ignore something is if it's there—but you focus on prioritizing the act of ignoring, not what's already there. And that's the most fundamental attitude towards experience, avijjā. Turning a blind eye. The only way you can turn a blind eye to something is if that thing is already there, so

the most fundamental attitude of turning a blind eye is that fundamental wrong-view in regard to the nature of existence—the fact that "I'm not my own". The fact that "I'm not in control of this—this body upon which my whole life depends. I'm subject to ageing, death, and suffering." All these things are obvious, but the only reason people do not resolve them is that they give priority to ignoring them. And that's what I mean—you give priority to your point of view on account of what's there, in regard to which you exercise your point of view. And that's why ignoring ignorance is a vicious circle—avijjā leads to more avijjā. Ignoring leads to maintenance of the attitude of ignoring.

What do I need to stop ignoring, to undo the entire avijjā, the whole saṃsāra? Stop ignoring the arisen feelings, … the arisen intentions. And that's why a person who has made that effort and stopped ignoring these things will become incapable of engaging in ill-will, anger, lying, cheating—even sensuality, because sensuality in itself is already that perversion on the fundamental level—finding pleasure in that which is truly ugly. You ignore that it's ugly—ignorance of the ugly is the basis for attraction.

Thaniyo: Or the unattractive.

Nyanamoli: Yes, ignoring the fundamental unattractiveness, the fundamental dispassion or absence of passion in it—ignoring that is how you have maintained passion for it.

Thaniyo: What's the nature of concealment?

Nyanamoli: Well, in many of the Suttas and the Buddhist writings, you often hear about greed, aversion and delusion:

lobha, dosa, and moha. People can get their head around greed and aversion, but often delusion is regarded as something that's not directly my responsibility, in as much as greed and aversion are.

Thaniyo: Like, "I don't know what I've done now."

Nyanamoli: Yes, so it's regarded in a semi-metaphysical sense—it's there, but it's not really something I can directly experience. But actually it is. Delusion is an attitude of your mind in as much as greed or lust and aversion are—otherwise they wouldn't have always been mentioned like that. So, from that point of view, delusion is more like an attitude of indolence, laziness.

Thaniyo: A choice to keep things cloudy.

Nyanamoli: Exactly. Keeping them opaque intentionally, turning a blind eye, distracting yourself intentionally with things that are going to take your mind away from yourself. You realize delusion is a very active thing and, as the Buddha said, that's why it's the most blameworthy. It's the hardest to undo as well. But the fact that you can undo it, means it's not this metaphysical lack of knowledge—it's your very attitude, that is even more fundamental than the attitude of lust and of aversion, which are secondary to it. Lust requires a basis of delusion, aversion requires a basis of delusion, delusion requires a basis of delusion. So, you are deluded through and through, not because you don't know certain things, but because you perpetually act out of ignorance, which then maintains you in the situation of ignorance. And the situation of ignorance is not ignorance as in not knowing something—it's you actively ignoring and giving priority to the ignoring.

It's choosing to distract yourself, for example by actively making a choice that will result in certain actions that are not necessarily lustful or hateful, but are based upon you not wanting to be self-aware. Entertainment or distraction in general—like when you think "I'm bored by myself because I'm aware of everything and it's very unpleasant, so I'll just go and chat to some people—not for sensual reasons or because I like them—just because I want something to do."

Often needing things to do is rooted in delusion, in distraction, indolence. You can be very diligent externally—doing all this work—but the reasons for your doing that work are rooted in your wanting to turn a blind eye with regard to yourself—you don't want to be self-aware, basically.

Thaniyo: You don't want to see the truth of your mind.

Nyanamoli: Well yes, because that will result in seeing the unpleasant truths of your mind, or simply unpleasant states of boredom, and so on. So you think "I better find something to do, I better find an external purpose. It will occupy my mind, so my mind won't be aware of itself, because it being aware of itself is too unpleasant, too threatening."

Thaniyo: It's a way to keep covering up the truth.

Nyanamoli: Exactly. It's a way of maintaining yourself in a state of cover-up.

Thaniyo: To keep the dust moving.

Nyanamoli: Exactly, otherwise if it settles, you get to see what's there, and it's unpleasant.

Thaniyo: That's the thing—being self-aware sounds like a good thing, but it's the most painful thing. Most people avoid it.

Nyanamoli: Yes. That's why solitude is very unpleasant to begin with.

As the Buddha himself said many times, you develop the pleasure of solitude. You won't get it right away. If done rightly, it's unpleasant because you're going against the grain of all the distraction you got used to, and that your existence depends upon. But that's it—when you stop maintaining all these attitudes that were based upon obscuring the self-awareness, the self-awareness increases. But it feels like—when the boredom starts giving rise to dread and anxiety—it feels like you yourself are drowning. It's crushing you. But what is actually crushing you is the assumed level of your own being, the one that you've been proliferating.

The solitude is not actually crushing you. Being alone in your room—not seeing or talking to anyone—cannot do anything to you. But your mind can drown in it, because it becomes dependent on a certain degree of engagement with the world—that is its' threshold. But that's not a static thing, that threshold, which means the more you engage, the more dependent upon engagement you become. Initially the lesser engagement might hurt, because you're used to engaging more. But then you get used to that, and then it will not be unpleasant.

In the same sense, when you're a very hectic person who's been doing a lot—engaging a lot, working a lot for whatever reasons — if you were made to sit down and stop engaging on that level, the discrepancy would be just too much to handle. But if you gradually start doing that and then start ceasing your

engagement, you'll get used to that new level—lacking the engagement that you used to have— which means you're responsible for the threshold of where your being is. That's what the Buddha meant when he said "His consciousness gets established upon that"—that becomes the norm, what you're used to, which means anything less than that is going to fill you with anxiety and dread.

But it's important to recognize that it's not a static thing. So people seek meaning through using engagement with the world —actions, meaningless or not meaningless work, or whatever else. Practically, you're engaging with the world for the purpose of escaping self-awareness, so you will become dependent on that level of engagement—anything less than that engagement will bring you back to your self-awareness. That means then that you have to keep maintaining the level of your engagement and, once you get used to it, you have to keep increasing it, if you try to use it to avoid self-awareness. And most people, to a degree, are using that—that's why most people are afraid to be alone. Not afraid of monsters and such, but afraid—in broad daylight—of being left alone in their room for a whole day without doing anything, without taking their mind away from themselves. It would result in them experiencing anxiety and existential dread because human life, on average, is about avoiding that self-awareness, which ties in with avoiding responsibility and feeds one another, and so on.

Thaniyo: But that self-awareness is the thing that's going to make things right, in a way.

Nyanamoli: That's why people are, because of their own actions, liable to suffering—because of that, not because of

someone else's fault or some design. It's because you act in a manner that keeps making you liable to suffer, keeps you exposed.

If you take responsibility for it, that's where what I'm saying might become apparent—that the level of engagement, the level of distraction, or turning a blind-eye is not a static thing. Which means the way you've been proliferating it, you can also undo it if you stop engaging with it, or you can certainly put a brake on its growth.

That's why bhava (being) in the Suttas is not a metaphysical thing—it's the level of your dependence on the senses, which is sensual being, the level of dependence on the sense of the world, duty, perceptions—the level you depend on them. But then you can start depending less on those things.

That's why an arahant has attained cessation of his being—he doesn't depend on anything. But he's still there, it's not that cessation of being means destruction. Being means assumption—the assumption of engagement, of avoiding responsibility, of sensuality—and that's what delusion is: ignoring, turning a blind eye, distracting yourself, not being able to live with yourself. And again you can ask, going back to that practical level that we always do, "Why is it that I don't want to be self-aware? Why is it that I need to distract myself from myself? Because it's unpleasant. So why am I then maintaining this whole level of being for which I'm responsible, the level of how much I depend on engagement with things? It's because I don't want to suffer."

Thaniyo: But failing to see that my very engagement is the root of my suffering.

Nyanamoli: Exactly. You might wonder "Why do I suffer, then? It's because I keep running away from suffering, that's why I suffer. Then, if I stop running away from suffering, I at least have a chance to not suffer."

Thaniyo: There's an example I heard with people in prison. In prison, punishment may be solitary confinement, and a lot of people would rather spend their time with other criminals—rapists, murderers—than be alone.

Nyanamoli: Well, it's not incidental that that was always the worst punishment: solitary confinement for prolonged periods of time. For an untrained mind, of course.

Thaniyo: Also, some would rather do things that are bad for them, like taking drugs, than be alone.

Nyanamoli: You would rather expose yourself to genuine existential risks than be alone with yourself.

Thaniyo: Like jumping out of a plane, parachuting, where you think "I'll put my life on the line, and I'd rather do all of these extreme sports just to avoid being alone."

Nyanamoli: Yes, that's what I mean—it's not a stationary thing, which means avoiding boredom needs to be maintained, because boredom sets in when you get used to the threshold—then you need to do more.

The same with sensuality, if people use sensuality as a means of escape, if people get angry as a means of escape, that's why they keep getting angrier and angrier as life goes by. They keep

getting used to it and it ceases to work—their means of escape ceases to work, so then they need to keep running harder.

Thaniyo: The truth is always there and it's always pushing.

Nyanamoli: Always. The fact that you give in to the attitude of ignoring the truth that's always there, means you're running around in a circle—you don't ever really run away from it. And everybody knows that.

If you ask any random person—even someone not familiar with Buddhism—whether one can satisfy one's sensual desires, most people will already know you can't. You can't satisfy them, you can only run around them. The same with anger: the satisfaction of revenge or inflicting pain back onto somebody—is that really preventing you from experiencing the pain in the first place? No. You know that, you just can't help it. And you can't help it because you keep ignoring the truth, you keep ignoring the nature of what's right in front of you. Hence, ignoring will automatically, inevitably, result in lust and aversion, in greed and anger and so on.

But that doesn't mean that, if you lock yourself in a room and stop engaging with the world, you will automatically arrive at the right understanding either, because it's a subtle thing. That's why the Buddha's instruction was necessary, or the instruction of somebody who's done it themselves the right way. The two possible outcomes for somebody who doesn't have that external instruction, if they were to lock themselves in, are madness—as in the mind would implode because it wouldn't know the way out of itself. Or you would develop a degree of that self-transparency and undo a great level of your being, which means you'd become more transparent—less subjected to

suffering— but you would have to give in to something. You wouldn't be able to maintain that transparency all the way to the core of your being, whereby you've undone every one of the slightest existential discrepancies—or slightest conceits, as the Buddha called them—and become an arahant. Because if you did that, you would be self-enlightened. So theoretically it's possible, but practically it's highly unlikely.

But that doesn't mean that you shouldn't even try. Even a person who's not necessarily interested in becoming fully enlightened and following the Buddha's instruction to the end, it would do them good if they'd start withdrawing or keeping in check the level of engagement and dependence on the world and the senses. Why? Because life will end in your losing that dependence on sickness, ageing and death. Losing your senses, the perception of the world, losing the things upon which your existence depends—or rather the things you used to maintain that level of being, that helped you to ignore yourself, to be unaware of yourself and the responsibility that's inherent in that awareness. If life were truly to last forever and you would always stay in control of your senses, then it would be fine—you could do it (indulge in senses). But it isn't, and you know that—everybody knows that. Yet you act as if you will live forever, and the more you're dependent on the senses that will disappear and break apart, the more you'll be affected when that happens. The less you're dependent, the less you'll be affected, and means the less you'll suffer.

It's like the simile the Buddha gave: climbing the tree to eat the mangos, and eventually somebody's bound to come up and cut that tree because they can't climb it to eat the mangos. Or even if they don't, the mangos will age and break down, and the tree

will fall. The higher you were up in that tree the harder you will crash, the more suffering you will experience. But if you kept yourself in check and stayed maybe on lower branches, used your reason and self-reflection to not go too far out, if you controlled yourself from climbing the tree in the first place, then you wouldn't crash as hard.

In practical terms, you keep yourself in check with regard to how much you depend on distraction, on other people, other people's company, on gratuitous health, your senses and the ability to access the world and distract yourself. If you reflected on it, you will keep yourself in check and then won't go too far in it. And then when you do get sick—when your senses do start to fail or when people leave you, or die, or don't do what you want them to do—you won't be as affected, because you haven't made yourself as dependent.

Thaniyo: But if you have concealed so much your whole life…

Nyanamoli: If you've concealed so much your whole life, it's never too late to start undoing that concealment. So that's really the problem there—if you never start undoing your own concealing of yourself from yourself, concealing the nature of yourself from yourself.

Thaniyo: You never actually faced displeasure.

Nyanamoli: Yes. Never admitted it where it is, where the problem of it is. That's why people are responsible for being bound to saṃsāra—it's not saṃsāra that binds you, you bind yourself to it. And the Buddha said something to the same effect when he said "It's because people take what's not theirs—what shouldn't be theirs, what cannot be theirs, as if it's theirs and

they act out of it that Māra does with them what he wants", controls them, subjects them to all these things. What are the things that cannot be yours and shouldn't be yours, but you keep taking as yours, and actually belong to Māra and not to you? It's your eyes and your sights, your nose and your smells—your very senses. The nature of them shows you that they're not yours. If you ignore this, you automatically take them as yours.

That's why just turning a blind eye is enough in itself to result in the whole mass of suffering. It's not like "I turn a blind eye, then I do a second step of taking it as mine, then I do this…" No, turning a blind eye to the nature of your senses, for example your eyes, your nose, your body, your life, automatically implies taking this as yours. Because if you ignore that it's not yours, you're automatically implying that it is yours, that it's for you, that it's in your control. And then you keep acting as if it is in your control, and that's how you perpetuate the turning of a blind eye—you keep acting out of it. You've got to stop acting out of it and then stop doing it internally, stop turning that blind eye, start admitting it, go against the grain.

That's why everybody can benefit from solitude, to the extent that they're able to practice it. But if you don't practice it to the full extent, you have to take responsibility for that as well. You might find yourself already too far in life, whereby you can't just withdraw from everything because there'll be consequences. But that's no-one else's responsibility—you're responsible for finding yourself in such a situation. But then people realize that they can't withdraw themselves from that situation, so then they feel justified in avoiding responsibility for it, and that's completely gratuitous. Yes, you might not be

able—you may have infants and whatever other family members depending on you, and you can't just leave, because they'll die. But that doesn't mean you're justified now in ignoring responsibility for that situation that you yourself built up. So yes, you can't ignore the fact that your choices brought you to these circumstances, where now other lives depend upon you, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't take responsibility for it—no matter how late the recognition of that responsibility comes. It's still better to take it than to ignore it further – because, who knows, through taking responsibility, some new ways and options might present themselves that you won't see as long as you're avoiding responsibility. But people don't take responsibility because it's unpleasant.

Thaniyo: When taking responsibility, things become clearer.

Nyanamoli: But because you're too concerned about not experiencing discomfort, you basically obscure and limit all these options that you could have otherwise become aware of. That's why you actually get more resilience—become less subjected to suffering—through recognizing, admitting, taking responsibility. It's initially more unpleasant—but in the long run, it's actually far more pleasant, or far less unpleasant.

Let's put it like this: because through taking responsibility, you see where the problem is, and the problem is in avoiding responsibility. That's why you suffer. You suffer not because a disagreeable feeling touches you—you suffer because you avoid responsibility for the suffering in regard to the disagreeable feeling. If you start taking responsibility for that suffering, in regard to the disagreeable feeling, you stop blaming it for that

suffering—which means you stop resisting, which means you stop suffering. That's it.

Thaniyo: You stop touching it.

Nyanamoli: You stop getting into the domain that doesn't belong to you—that belongs to Māra. If you stop taking it as yours, that's it—you cannot be affected by anything then, no matter how disagreeable.

131hh- Even Being A Layman Does Not Justify Your Sensuality

The practice starts by learning what the Buddha taught.

For a person who is interested in following the Buddha's instruction, it is important to start reading the discourses that contain that instruction. Equally important is to continue reading them; [not so much in the sense of reading enormous quantities of discourses, but in the sense of re-reading and studying again those that you read.]

This is because the discourses can be understood according to many layers of meaning: the first time you read a sutta, you might feel inspired and it makes some sense; but if you make a practice of reading a discourse more than once, you will quickly realise that there is something further to be understood within the original meaning that you might have gleaned. Although the previous understanding might have been correct, it can be taken further. You can never know too much in terms of the Buddha's instruction.

This is important to recognize, because the more you know, the more likely you are to be applying yourself to the practice correctly. This means that you are in turn more likely to discern those things [that are referred to in the discourses] within your own experience.

So it is important to practice learning. However, in order for what is learned to be applicable, virtue and sense restraint need

to be fully established: and that is the main point [that is often overlooked]. Often people differentiate between “practice for lay people” and “practice for monks”. It is true that there is a difference in terms of the external statement and the particular lifestyle, but in terms of practice, the important distinction is between living involved with sensuality, and living without it.

Lay life does not equal sensual life.

Usually, it is true, a layperson is a person who lives with sensuality; and monks are those practicing restraint. [However ‘being a layperson’ and ‘living with sensuality’ are two entirely separate things; one does not need to imply the other.] It is important to make this distinction. If someone (wishing to seriously practice Buddhism) chooses to live as a layperson for whatever reason, this does not automatically imply that they don’t need to practice sense restraint.

Quite often I would hear people saying something like “I cannot be a monk, because I have to look after my mother.” [Their implicit conclusion to this is] “… and therefore because I have a good reason not to be a monk, I can also engage in sensuality by default.”

That is completely wrong thinking. It is one decision to pursue the lifestyle of a layperson as opposed to that of a monk. The decision to, on top of this, neglect sense restraint - or to practice it only partially - has nothing to do with the choice of being a layman.

You are always responsible for acting out of sensuality. This is what you are choosing to ignore by equating lay life with sensual life. The same problem of avoiding responsibility can

often cause somebody to become a monk, but then to expect the circumstances and environment to do the sense restraint for them. That is, they make no effort to uproot sensuality internally on the level of the mind, so although they are not engaging in sensual activity with their body, they remain very much within the sensual domain.

Possibility of lay Dhamma practice does not mean possibility of sensual practice

There are discourses in which laypeople understood the Dhamma. However, it is very important to see that they certainly did not understand the Dhamma on account of a sensual life. Whenever people who were not monks understood the Dhamma, it was through being withdrawn from sensuality as a necessary condition. Even if they decided to go back to sensuality afterwards, that would always have to be done at the expense of the practice. Sensuality is always in direct contradiction to the principles of the Dhamma that need to be understood; you cannot have both.

Due to complacency, a person might become content with what they have understood and not make any further effort, but the Buddha would always admonish people in such cases and urge them not to be complacent. So if complacency is ill-advised even for somebody with a considerable attainment - what is to be said about attempting to develop that attainment with the attitude of complacency as your starting point? The idea that“I am fine in whatever environment I am in, and sensuality is not a problem for me,” is entirely wrong thinking according to the principles of Dhamma. Sensuality is always a problem.

The decision to remain as a layperson is already a serious compromise

Another point to consider is that even the decision to remain as a layperson is already not something to be taken lightly. If you want to understand the Dhamma, you need to live withdrawn from sensuality, which is certainly easier to do if you are not a layperson living an ordinary lay lifestyle. This means that if you choose to live as a layperson, you are adding another extra task for yourself on top of trying to understand the Dhamma: namely sense restraint amidst the environment which does anything but encourage sense restraint. This is very hard to sustain, which is exactly why people tend to turn a blind eye to the fact that they are responsible for the choice of their environment, and just go with it.

Back in the Buddha's day, if someone remained as a layperson rather than going forth on account of their confidence in the Buddha's teaching, this was nearly always rooted in some necessity; such as looking after children or dependents who would not be able to survive alone. It was not just that others would be upset if they were not there; it was that they would literally die without them.

If somebody did not go forth only because they were protecting other people's lives, they did not take their duty towards family as an excuse to also live a sensual life. They would continue to practice [sense restraint], as laypeople.

Mountain sutta

> **"...Aggivessana, it's as if there were a great mountain and two companions would go to that**

mountain. On arrival, one of the companions would stay at the foot of the mountain, and one would climb to the top. The companion staying at the foot of the mountain would ask the companion standing on top, 'What do you see, my friend, standing on top of the mountain?'

"He would say, 'I see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes.'

"The other would say, 'It's impossible, my friend. It cannot happen that standing on top of the mountain you would see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, & delightful lakes.'

"Then the companion standing on top, descending to the foot of the mountain and grabbing his companion by the arm, would make him climb to the top. After letting him catch his breath for a moment, he would ask him, 'What do you see, my friend, standing on top of the mountain?'

"He would say, 'I see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes.'

"The other would say, 'But just now didn't you say, "It's impossible, my friend. It cannot happen, that standing on top of the mountain you would see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes"? Yet now I understand you to say, "I see delightful parks,

> **delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes.'"**
>
> **"The other would say, 'But that's because I was standing blocked by this great mountain and didn't see.'**
>
> **"In the same way, Aggivessana, Prince Jayasena is blocked, obstructed, impeded, and enveloped by the even greater mass of ignorance. For him, living amid sensuality, enjoying sensuality, consumed by thoughts of sensuality, burning with the fever of sensuality, intent on the search for sensuality, to know or see or realize that which is to be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, attained through renunciation, realized through renunciation: That's impossible. …"**
>
> – MN 125

So the point to recognise is that your criteria for what is right and possible are not necessarily correct from the point of view that you have at the bottom of the mountain. Refusing to climb, for whatever reason, does not give you the excuse to indulge in whatever is at the bottom of the mountain. Again, it doesn't matter whether you wear robes or not: what matters is whether you are physically withdrawn from sensuality; whether you accept it on the mental level and whether you are practicing sense restraint for the goal of overcoming it.

Most important of all is to take responsibility for your choices, [including the choice to remain as a layperson.] Otherwise, you will not feel responsible for engaging in sensuality, because you

already have not taken responsibility for choosing not to climb the mountain; not to go into the higher environment. If you do take responsibility for that choice and fully consider it, you can see that it is indeed still possible to practice, but far from the choice of environment being an excuse for carelessness, you know that you are making a compromise and therefore you have to be twice as careful at the bottom of the mountain.

If you think, “I am not at the top and therefore I can fully indulge and engage with whatever comes my way down here at the bottom,” that is a whole other layer of sensuality and self-deception, on top of a decision that is already a compromise.

What is the degree of sense restraint that is the necessary basis for the practice?

The practice starts by learning [what the practice is]. This has to involve realising that there is no possibility for understanding anything that has been learned unless there is a proper basis of virtue developed, and a proper establishment of sense restraint. In concrete terms, this means keeping more than the five precepts - at minimum it means being celibate and eating for the right reasons.

Even back in the Buddha’s day, the five precepts were not sufficient for developing the right view. Rather, they were and remain a non-negotiable basis for the arising of a human life. In other words, if you do not want to live like an animal, then the five precepts are the threshold below which you cannot go. Yes, five precepts do offer some improvement to an unrestrained mind, but if you want to understand the Dhamma or discern the sign of your mind, (the necessary condition for sotapatti, i.e.

the right view) then the mind needs to be fully withdrawn from sensuality. It needs to be celibate, and not entertaining sensual options throughout the day.

So if you can sustain that degree of carefulness and restraint in the environment at the bottom of the mountain - that's fine, but you should recognise that this is not at all an easy thing to do. Even back in the Buddha's day it was hard to sustain, without all the various easy options for distraction that we have today. To sustain such restraint today in such a sensual pressuring environment, you will need to possess some serious willpower. If you were to possess such willpower, then actually there would be nothing binding you to the bottom of that mountain anyway. You would have already overcome it and moved to a better place.

MN 81: With Ghaṭikāra

> **"So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was wandering in the land of the Kosalans together with a large Saṅgha of mendicants. Then the Buddha left the road, and at a certain spot, he smiled. Then Venerable Ānanda thought, "What is the cause, what is the reason why the Buddha smiled? Realized Ones do not smile for no reason." So Ānanda got up from his seat, arranged his robe over one shoulder, raised his joined palms toward the Buddha, and said, "What is the cause, what is the reason why the Buddha smiled? Realized Ones do not smile for no reason."**
>
> **"Once, Ānanda, there was a market town in this spot named Vebhaliṅga. It was prosperous and full of**

people. And Kassapa, a blessed one, a perfected one, a fully awakened Buddha, lived supported by Vebhaliṅga. It was here, in fact, that he had his monastery, where he sat and advised the mendicant Saṅgha." Then Ānanda spread out his outer robe folded in four and said to the Buddha, "Well then, sir, may the Blessed One sit here! Then this piece of land will have been occupied by two perfected ones, fully awakened Buddhas." The Buddha sat on the seat spread out. When he was seated he said to Venerable Ānanda:

"Once, Ānanda, there was a market town in this spot named Vebhaliṅga. It was prosperous and full of people. And Kassapa, a blessed one, a perfected one, a fully awakened Buddha, lived supported by Vebhaliṅga. It was here, in fact, that he had his monastery, where he sat and advised the mendicant Saṅgha.

The Buddha Kassapa had as a chief supporter in Vebhaliṅga a potter named Ghaṭīkāra. Ghaṭīkāra had a dear friend named Jotipāla, a brahmin student. Then Ghaṭīkāra addressed Jotipāla, 'Come, dear Jotipāla, let's go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.'

When he said this, Jotipāla said to him, 'Enough, dear Ghaṭīkāra. What's the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?'

For a second time … and a third time, Ghaṭīkāra addressed Jotipāla, ‘Come, dear Jotipāla, let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

For a third time, Jotipāla said to him, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭīkāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

‘Well then, dear Jotipāla, let’s take some bathing paste of powdered shell and go to the river to bathe.’

‘Yes, dear,’ replied Jotipāla. So that’s what they did.

Then Ghaṭīkāra addressed Jotipāla, ‘Dear Jotipāla, the Buddha Kassapa’s monastery is not far away. Let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

When he said this, Jotipāla said to him, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭīkāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

For a second time … and a third time, Ghaṭīkāra addressed Jotipāla, ‘Dear Jotipāla, the Buddha Kassapa’s monastery is not far away. Let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

For a third time, Jotipāla said to him, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭīkāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

Then Ghaṭīkāra grabbed Jotipāla by the belt and said, ‘Dear Jotipāla, the Buddha Kassapa’s monastery is not far away. Let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

So Jotipāla undid his belt and said to Ghaṭīkāra, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭīkāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

Then Ghaṭīkāra grabbed Jotipāla by the hair of his freshly-washed head and said, ‘Dear Jotipāla, the Buddha Kassapa’s monastery is not far away. Let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

Then Jotipāla thought, ‘It’s incredible, it’s amazing, how this potter Ghaṭikāra, though born in a lower caste, should presume to grab me by the hair of my freshly-washed head! This must be no ordinary matter.’ He said to Ghaṭīkāra, ‘You’d even milk it to this extent, dear Ghaṭīkāra?’

‘I even milk it to this extent, dear Jotipāla. For that is how holy I regard it to see that Blessed One.’

‘Well then, dear Ghaṭīkāra, release me, we shall go.’

Then Ghaṭīkāra the potter and Jotipāla the brahmin student went to the Buddha Kassapa. Ghaṭīkāra bowed and sat down to one side, but Jotipāla exchanged greetings with the Buddha and sat down to one side.

Ghaṭīkāra said to the Buddha Kassapa, 'Sir, this is my dear friend Jotipāla, a brahmin student. Please teach him the Dhamma.' Then the Buddha Kassapa educated, encouraged, fired up, and inspired Ghaṭikāra and Jotipāla with a Dhamma talk. Then they got up from their seat, bowed, and respectfully circled the Buddha Kassapa, keeping him on their right, before leaving.

Then Jotipāla said to Ghatīkāra, 'Dear Ghaṭīkāra, you have heard this teaching, so why don't you go forth from the lay life to homelessness?'

'Don't you know, dear Jotipāla, that I look after my blind old parents?'

'Well then, dear Ghaṭīkāra, I shall go forth from the lay life to homelessness.'

Then Ghaṭīkāra and Jotipāla went to the Buddha Kassapa, bowed, and sat down to one side. Ghaṭīkāra said to the Buddha Kassapa, 'Sir, this is my dear friend Jotipāla, a brahmin student. Please give him the going forth.' And Jotipāla the brahmin student received the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha's presence.

Not long after Jotipāla's ordination, a fortnight later, the Buddha Kassapa—having stayed in Vebhaliṅga as long as he wished—set out for Benares. Traveling stage by stage, he arrived at Benares, where he stayed near Benares, in the deer park at Isipatana. King Kikī of Kāsi heard that he had arrived. He had the finest carriages harnessed. He then mounted a fine carriage and, along with other fine carriages, set out in full royal pomp from Benares to see the Buddha Kassapa. He went by carriage as far as the terrain allowed, then descended and approached the Buddha Kassapa on foot. He bowed and sat down to one side. The Buddha educated, encouraged, fired up, and inspired him with a Dhamma talk.

Then King Kikī said to the Buddha, 'Sir, would the Buddha together with the mendicant Saṅgha please accept tomorrow's meal from me?' The Buddha Kassapa consented in silence.

Then, knowing that the Buddha had consented, King Kikī got up from his seat, bowed, and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on his right, before leaving. And when the night had passed, King Kikī had a variety of delicious foods prepared in his own home—soft saffron rice with the dark grains picked out, served with many soups and sauces. Then he had the Buddha informed of the time, saying, 'Sir, it's time. The meal is ready.'

Then Kassapa Buddha robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, went to the home of King

Kikī, where he sat on the seat spread out, together with the Saṅgha of mendicants. Then King Kikī served and satisfied the mendicant Saṅgha headed by the Buddha with his own hands with a variety of delicious foods.

When the Buddha Kassapa had eaten and washed his hand and bowl, King Kikī took a low seat and sat to one side. There he said to the Buddha Kassapa, 'Sir, may the Buddha please accept my invitation to reside in Benares for the rainy season. The Saṅgha will be looked after in the same style.'

'Enough, great king. I have already accepted an invitation for the rains residence.'

For a second time … and a third time King Kikī said to the Buddha Kassapa, 'Sir, may the Buddha please accept my invitation to reside in Benares for the rainy season. The Saṅgha will be looked after in the same style.'

'Enough, Great King. I have already accepted an invitation for the rains residence.'

Then King Kikī, thinking, 'The Buddha does not accept my invitation to reside for the rains in Benares,' became sad and upset. Then King Kikī said to the Buddha Kassapa, 'Sir, do you have another supporter better than me?'

'Great king, there is a market town named Vebhaliṅga, where there's a potter named Ghaṭīkāra.

He is my chief supporter. Now, great king, you thought, "The Buddha does not accept my invitation to reside for the rains in Benares," and you became sad and upset. But Ghaṭīkāra doesn't get upset, nor will he.

Ghaṭīkāra has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the teaching, and the Saṅgha. He doesn't kill living creatures, steal, commit sexual misconduct, lie, or take alcoholic drinks that cause negligence. He has experiential confidence in the Buddha, the teaching, and the Saṅgha, and has the ethics loved by the noble ones. He is free of doubt regarding suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation. He eats in one part of the day; he's celibate, ethical, and of good character. He has set aside gems and gold and rejected gold and money. He's put down the shovel and doesn't dig the earth with his own hands. He takes what has crumbled off by a riverbank or been dug up by mice, and brings it back in a carrier. When he has made a pot, he says, "Anyone may leave bagged sesame, mung beans, or chickpeas here and take what they wish." He looks after his blind old parents. And since he has ended the five lower fetters, Ghaṭīkāra will be reborn spontaneously and will become extinguished there, not liable to return from that world.

This one time, great king, I was staying near the market town of Vebhaliṅga. Then I robed up in the morning and, taking my bowl and robe, went to the

home of Ghaṭīkāra's parents, where I said to them, "Excuse me, where has Ghaṭīkāra gone?"

"Your supporter has gone out, sir. But take rice from the pot and sauce from the pan and eat." So that's what I did. And after eating I got up from my seat and left.

Then Ghaṭīkāra went up to his parents and said, "Who took rice from the pot and sauce from the pan, ate it, and left?"

"It was the Buddha Kassapa, my dear."

Then Ghaṭīkāra thought, "I'm so fortunate, so very fortunate, in that the Buddha Kassapa trusts me so much!" Then joy and happiness did not leave him for a fortnight, or his parents for a week.

Another time, great king, I was staying near that same market town of Vebhaliṅga. Then I robed up in the morning and, taking my bowl and robe, went to the home of Ghaṭīkāra's parents, where I said to them, "Excuse me, where has Ghaṭīkāra gone?"

"Your supporter has gone out, sir. But take porridge from the pot and sauce from the pan and eat." So that's what I did. And after eating I got up from my seat and left.

Then Ghaṭīkāra went up to his parents and said, "Who took porridge from the pot and sauce from the pan, ate it, and left?"

“It was the Buddha Kassapa, my dear.”

Then Ghaṭīkāra thought, “I’m so fortunate, so very fortunate, to be trusted so much by the Buddha Kassapa!” Then joy and happiness did not leave him for a fortnight, or his parents for a week.

Another time, great king, I was staying near that same market town of Vebhaliṅga. Now at that time my hut leaked. So I addressed the mendicants,

“Mendicants, go to Ghaṭikāra’s home and find some grass.”

When I said this, those mendicants said to me, “Sir, there’s no grass there, but his workshop has a grass roof.”

“Then go to the workshop and strip the grass.” So that’s what they did.

Then Ghaṭīkāra’s parents said to those mendicants, “Who’s stripping the grass from the workshop?”

“It’s the mendicants, sister. The Buddha’s hut is leaking.”

“Take it, sirs! Take it, my dears!”

Then Ghaṭīkāra went up to his parents and said, “Who stripped the grass from the workshop?”

“It was the mendicants, dear. It seems the Buddha’s hut is leaking.”

Then Ghaṭīkāra thought, "I'm so fortunate, so very fortunate, to be trusted so much by the Buddha Kassapa!" Then joy and happiness did not leave him for a fortnight, or his parents for a week.

Then the workshop remained with the sky for a roof for the whole three months, but no rain fell on it. And that, great king, is what Ghaṭīkāra the potter is like.'

'Ghaṭīkāra the potter is fortunate, very fortunate, to be so trusted by the Buddha Kassapa.'

Then King Kikī sent around five hundred cartloads of rice, soft saffron rice, and suitable sauce to Ghaṭīkāra. Then one of the king's men approached Ghaṭīkāra and said, 'Sir, these five hundred cartloads of rice, soft saffron rice, and suitable sauce have been sent to you by King Kikī of Kāsī. Please accept them.'

'The king has many duties, and much to do. I have enough. Let this be for the king himself.'

Ānanda, you might think: 'Surely the brahmin student Jotipāla must have been someone else at that time?' But you should not see it like this. I was the student Jotipāla at that time."

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, Venerable Ānanda was happy with what the Buddha said.

150hh- Valuing Sense Pleasures Makes You An Addict

Q: You mentioned before that a person cannot get the right view without first abandoning the value of sensuality, what did you mean by that?

Nm: First one must understand that the non-performance of sensual acts is not necessarily the abandoning of sensuality. You might be celibate and abstaining from sensuality, and still not be abandoning the value of sense pleasure, which means for as long as you don't abandon the value of sense pleasures, you're preventing the necessary basis for the right view from arising, no matter how physically restrained you are.

Q: So what is the value of sensuality?

Nm: It's your gratuitous attitude towards the pleasure that you get through your senses. The sense objects and the sense organs are not a problem. Even the pleasures that arise on account of sense objects are not the problem. You valuing them, desiring them, entertaining them, protecting them, delighting in him, that's the problem. So you have to abandon the value of sense pleasure, which means you have to be willing to accept, in that universal manner, that for the rest of your life, sense pleasure is bad, not to be engaged with. As I said before, even if you fail to free yourself from sensuality entirely, you will not fail in establishing the value of the sensuality as being bad, which means whenever you fail in sustaining such acts of renunciation, you will feel guilty, you will feel ashamed. So next time, that shame will make you think twice, but it will not

protect you from doing it if you never even questioned the value of sense pleasures. But if even before you start questioning it, you start defending and justifying your sensual acts, that means you're never going to uproot it even if you live celibate for the rest of your life.

You uproot sensuality by uprooting the value of pleasure, not by abstaining physically from it. Of course, abstaining physically from it is a necessary basis for you to see the value of it and then you can uproot it, but in itself, it will not automatically result in freedom.

All the sense pleasures are addictive and all addictions share that same nature of valuing pleasure.

So obviously sexuality and that kind of deeply rooted, sensual needs are the greatest of all addictions, but like any other addiction, if you abstain from it, it will become more apparent for what it is. The only reason you're not seeing your addiction is because you refuse to give it up. But if you start having reasons for giving it up, then you get to see how addicted you are. You're never going to see how addicted to cigarettes or heroin you are until you try and quit. That's when you will feel the weight of it. So the necessary step for giving up an addiction is to give it up, stop doing it. By restraining yourself physically, your value of it will become more apparent, which means you have to accept the inevitable pain of withdrawal. That has to be the first step, and not just accept it for a week or for 10 days, you have to accept it universally- ‘You don't know for how long and it doesn't matter’.

Sensuality will never be valuable, even as something that could free you from pain, which is the inherent value of sensuality.

Not just that it provides you with pleasure, it provides you with the only form of escape from the pain that you know, which means even if you don't value sensual pleasures, you value sensuality as the means of escape from discomfort. And that's already wrong. That's already a problem. So, if you see through the apparent value of sensuality and see it as non-valuable, as something not to be delighted in, as something dangerous and unworthy, then you have to accept the pain that will come out of that. You kind of know that it will not last for the rest of your life but hoping that it doesn't last for the rest of your life means implicitly hoping that you can return back to sensuality. And you must never accept sensuality. Even in the most remote future.

You have to understand why you are attracted to sense pleasures. Not in a psychologising manner. "Oh, because my hormones...etc", No, why do you value the pleasures of the senses? Why can you just NOT value them? Because you never tried to not value them. You're always taking it for granted. Pleasure is always regarded as good and only when it gets a bit excessive, you say "okay, now it's a bit much", but no, you don't want your value to depend on the quantity or even quality of the pleasure. Doesn't matter if it's lofty, if it's heavenly, if it's lowly like the animal realm, doesn't matter if it's a little or a lot, a little bit of excrement, smells as bad as a truckload of it. Same with sensuality, a little bit of it, shares the same nature of the perilous danger, not worth engaging in, doesn't matter how refined.

There is no way you will be able to devalue the value of sensuality unless you are first physically withdrawn from it, unless you take on the sense restraint and the precepts. And

really, we're talking about eight precepts. Five precepts are how you should live a life which separates you from an animal. Five precepts are the lowest minimum threshold for a wholesome life. But that doesn't mean you can get wisdom on account of that minimum threshold.

Q: So the value in sensuality is that it provides pleasure.

Nm: Yes, the value of sensuality is that it provides you with pleasure from the pain of itself. Sensuality touches you with pain, but at the same time, it offers you a solution for that pain. It's just like racketeering: "Okay, if you pay me, I'll make your problems go away, problems that I put on you so that you will pay me". So you get extorted by your own sensuality, your own desires. And the more you pay, the more it’s going to come knocking because you're susceptible. It will bleed you dry. That’s what sensuality does to you, until you draw a line for yourself and endure the pain.

The reason why addictions are hard to give up, is because you're not giving them up specifically, you're giving up the whole world you lived through them, hence the fear of restraint. Whether it's alcohol, cigarettes, drugs doesn't matter. The reason they're pleasant is because you get to experience the whole world on the basis of that substance or that addiction or that pleasure. Heroin is not pleasant in itself, but experiencing the world through heroin is where that pleasure comes from. That blissful, undisturbed peace that people will be addicted to, is defined by the experience of the world on account of it. That's why you literally lose any interest in the world. Because you stop feeling anything in regards to it, which is what we all want to do from the start. Everybody wants peace. Everybody wants

non-disturbance. And now you found a substance that provides you with utmost pleasure, whereby nothing can disturb you for as long as a substance lasts, but that non-disturbance gets defined by the disturbance that circumstantially doesn't disturb you anymore.

Your senses stop disturbing you if you're high on certain drugs. And that's why it gets so painful, the withdrawal from those sense pleasures, because you're withdrawing from the only world you know, so more often than not, such withdrawal will feel like dying. Same with cigarettes by the way. You smoke a cigarette, you are literally inhaling the whole world through it, as Sartre described in his book, and it's absolutely true, everything that you've been doing, you've been doing on the basis of the possibility of that pleasure.

Imagine now, you want to abandon sexual pleasure, which is far more rooted than heroin or any other drug you can be addicted to. You will need to have a pretty strong reason for abandoning it. Otherwise, there's no way you'll succeed. However, even if you don't succeed in doing it, you must not dilute the reasons for doing it, because if you do that, for sure, you will not succeed. If you start devaluing the 'NON-value of sensuality' means you're automatically valuing sensuality. So if you say, "no, I don't need to be restrained. And I can practice Dhamma at the same time", means you're saying "I don't need to abandon the value of sensuality, and at the same time, I can practice Dhamma. But what is Dhamma? Well, Dhamma is the dispassion and freedom from sensuality". So you're saying you do not need to devalue sensuality and by not devaluing it, you are devaluing it. That's a plain contradiction, and that's what the Buddha said, even to people who are not necessarily

following his teachings, when they asked him what criteria should they use for good or bad, he said whatever practice leads to dispassion, disenchantment, abandoning, renunciation, you should value it, you should do it. So which practice leads to dispassion? Celibacy or non-celibacy? Sense restraint or non-sense restraint? which one leads to disenchantment? Well, the answer is straightforward.

Now, you can say "yeah, but it's too much for me", okay, that's fine, you admit that you are too weak, and that's the necessary basis for developing strength - recognizing your weakness. But if you say "No, I don't need to be restrained". That's it. You have just thrown away the whole thing and now you will stay weak. Same when people say "I can give up smoking whenever I want", But they can't WANT to give up smoking whenever they want. And without wanting to give up smoking without removing the value of smoking, you will never give it up.

Q: Some say that they can give up their addiction if they can find a replacement.

Nm: Which means that they need something to replace the vacuum left by removing the content of that which they value, which means they will never devalue it. You just replace it. You replace one addiction with the other. You're still addicted.

Q: Maybe if I replaced my addiction with a more refined or subtle one. So instead of drugs, I turn to devotion to precepts and so on.

Nm: See, that's fine. As long as you don't ignore the value of your addiction at the expense of it. In other words, yes, let me replace my non-precept keeping with five precepts, it's still

better. But let me not develop the view that five precepts will be enough for me to devalue my addiction because it's not. If you don't develop that view, then it's fine. Then you can refine your five precepts on to eight precepts and so on. The common thread through all of that is, you wanting to be free from the value of sensuality. But if you replace your non-precepts with the five precepts and say, "That's it, see, I am now fully accomplished in restraint " means, now you mask the fact that there is still a lot more to be done in order to uproot the value sensuality. So yes, you can replace your addiction with precepts or something else that is on the side of wholesome. But don't entertain the notion that you are free from addiction.

155hh- You Don't Need To Say No To Everything

Nm: What needs to be restrained? Do you say no to everything, to whatever your eye wants to see or whatever your nose wants to smell? How would you know what to say no to?

Q: Depends on my motivations.

Nm: So what would be the motivation for restraint?

Q: Wanting pleasure and not wanting pain.

Nm: Well, you always want pleasure, you always don't want pain. That's the implicit starting point. Whatever you do it's done for the sake of pleasure, and you trying to say no to every desire, to everything, will also be done for the sake of pleasure. So you'll be denying everything for the same reason, and therefore it won't free you from the problem.

The sole purpose of restraint is to develop context regarding your motivations. You have to understand that you wanting to practice restraint is rooted in the same desire, that's what the Buddha meant when he said desire is to be abandoned by the means of desire, but not simply that desire can be abandoned through the desire, or that just by craving, you will abandon craving, No, you crave for freedom from craving initially, but if you start looking at the context of your motivation, where things are rooted, what type of intention is behind what you want to do, what you've done or what you're planning to do, that's then how you make craving redundant. By avoiding doing things that perpetuate craving, because not all things

perpetuate craving. Not all things perpetuate ignorance. Things that are rooted in lust, aversion, and distraction perpetuate craving and ignorance.

Lust, aversion, and distraction are not IN things that you are doing. They are in your motivations that make you act for those reasons. And that's what the Buddha said :

> **“Thought and lust are a man’s sensuality,**
> **Not the various things in the world;**
> **Thought and lust are a man’s sensuality,**
> **The various things just stand there in the world;**
> **But the wise get rid of desire therein.”**
>
> – AN 6.63

If you want to uproot lust, aversion and delusion, it's not simply by doing this and abstaining from that, it's by knowing your intentions behind your actions and refraining from acting out of the unwholesome. But for that to be discerned you need to first restrain your habitual action towards the beautiful/wanted, habitual action away from the ugly/unwanted, habitual action from distracting yourself from boredom, but not for its own sake, only for the sake to see how lust, aversion, delusion are actually on the level of your intentions, your choices, and not in the senses or sense objects.

That's also how ‘virtue and duty’ is a fetter, it's you assuming lust, aversion, delusion to be in these things that you're now abstaining from, and by abstaining from it, you think that's all you need to do. If you think that your mission is accomplished, by abstaining from bad things, you will not look for where the badness of bad things is rooted. Which is in your intentions.

So when we talk about sense restraint, you take on the precepts, and then within that, you see what the mind presents you with. If you say, I will not do anything because everything is rooted in desire, that will be rooted in desire. That's your desire. If you say, I will stop thinking, that is your thought. So you can't just decide to step outside of the problem. You are made up of the problem, your existence is the problem.

So you take on the precepts, you take on sense restraint, on the level of faith first, and now you go throughout your day, having to do things and you can't stop doing and you shouldn't stop doing. You just want to know where your motivation is rooted and if you wonder, how far to go with that? Well, you go within the precepts. If things that are presented to you to be done, would be breaking the precepts, you just say no to that. You don't need to overthink that side of things. But if it's within the precepts, doesn't mean "Oh, I can do it justifiably because it's not breaking the precepts", nor is it "I must deny everything, because everything is rooted in desire". No, the same thing today can be rooted in one motivation, but tomorrow it can be rooted in another motivation. But if all you see is the thing that you either always say yes or no to, you're never going to see your motivation, which is where the whole problem has always been. The lust, aversion, delusion can never step outside of the domain of your intention and enter these things in the world. It always remains within your intention.

First, you need to recognize your intention, your motivation, then the more effort you make towards discerning it, the clearer the discernment will become.

You might say " The problem is in the desire towards this and that. So I'll say no to that, but now I have a desire to say no to everything. So I'll say no to that". So you just start saying no to more and more things and wind yourself up completely and equally have no perspective in as much as if you were engaging with sensuality. That's like the ignoble way of that self-mortification and denial of everything.

You have the precepts and within that, you question things, for example: "I want to go for a walk. Why? Oh, because I'm restless. Okay, yeah, that's not the perfect motivation but is it a sensual motivation? Is it because I'm hoping to experience a sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, that will excite me? No, not specifically just because it's too hot under this roof and I want some breeze. Okay, that's alright. I'm not sure how ideal it is or not, but I know that it's not as bad as sensuality or as breaking the precepts". So you do it. You go for a walk because you want some breeze, you want some comfort. But then next time that you want to go for a walk, you re-evaluate. You don't just do it again because you've done it before. So is it still rooted in comfort? Yes. Is it still not rooted in sensuality? Yes. But can you perhaps endure the discomfort and not go for a walk? You always want to see where your motivation is rooted. Like, why do I want the breeze and the comfort? Because I'm sleepy, and I'll fall asleep, but if I go for a walk, I'll be awake and then I can spend more time diligently practicing. If that's the reason, then you don't need to fear doing it.

You need to maintain perspective on your intent, and you will get to know that perspective by keeping the precepts and practicing sense restraint, by creating the boundary within which you can discern when your mind moves towards or over

the boundary of the precepts. That's also why the Buddha never allowed ascetic practices like living at the root of a tree and so on, as mandatory because, for some, such actions might be rooted in the unwholesome.

Discern your intent behind your current situation, and say no to the unwholesome.

When you start doing this it will seem restrictive but when you get used to it, you will see that a whole space opens up whereby you can do many things which do not partake in or maintain the unwholesome. And by no longer maintaining unwholesome intentions through acting out of them, they will have to diminish and eventually cease.

Agreeable or disagreeable things do not cause your suffering, it's your intent which is the cause. Knowing your intent while keeping the precepts, that's how your mind will develop rightly, and if you get confused about your intent just step back and question what your intent is in trying to not be confused and in doubt, which will then reveal your intent. Sometimes it is difficult to find your intent but it is always right there, it's the basis for anything you are about to do or are doing.

The clearer the perspective you have on the mind, the easier it will be to not act on unwholesome intentions.

People act habitually, addictively because there is no perspective on their situation. Once the perspective is increased through one's effort then what constitutes sense restraint is self-evident. You only restrain things that are rooted in the unwholesome, you don't restrain everything because that's like starving yourself to death. Initially and more often than not,

you might need to be restraining more than usual, to be on a safer side. That's why the Buddha would always lean on the side of asceticism*, even if in itself it does not necessarily result in wisdom. Just don't become neurotic and say no to everything. Because that means that you'll lose context and won't be aware of your intent.

* MN 3 - Dhammadayada sutta:

> **"...Now, monks, suppose that I had eaten, refused more food, had my fill, finished, had enough, had what I needed, and some alms-food was left over to be thrown away. Then two monks arrived hungry and weak, and I told them: 'Monks, I have eaten and have had all I needed, but there is this alms-food of mine left over to be thrown away. Eat it if you like; if you do not eat it then I shall throw it away where there is no greenery or drop it into the water where there is no life.' Then one monk thought: 'the Blessed One has eaten and had what he needed, but there is this alms-food of the Blessed One left over to be thrown away; if we do not eat it the Blessed One will throw it away, but this has been said by the Blessed One: 'Monks, be my heirs in Dhamma, not my heirs in material things.' Now this alms-food is one of the material things. Suppose that instead of eating this alms-food I pass the night and day hungry and weak.' And instead of eating that alms-food, he passed that night and day hungry and weak. Then the second monk thought: 'the Blessed One has eaten and he has had all that he required, but there is this alms-food of the Blessed One left over to be**

thrown away. Suppose that I eat this alms-food and pass the night and day neither hungry nor weak.' And after eating that alms-food he passed the night and day neither hungry nor weak. Now although that monk by eating that alms-food passed the night and day neither hungry nor weak, yet the first monk is more to be respected and commended by me. Why, because the willpower that he has demonstrated shall contribute to the fewness of his wishes, contentment, effacement, easy support, and arousal of energy. Therefore, monks, be my heirs in Dhamma, not my heirs in material things."

168hh- The Contradiction in the Unwholesome

Nm: Unwholesome things are unwholesome because in themselves they contain a contradiction or a discrepancy.

Killing

Q: You can see the same thread of contradiction running through every unwholesome action. Take killing, for example, one takes away the life of another which does not belong to you.

Nm: It's a contradiction. You're destroying something that's not yours as if it were yours. Also, life is implicitly valuable for everyone, even for people who don't necessarily have a view that life is worth living. Still, they can only do that based on being alive. That means that life in itself is taken at its face value, and it has value. So, you as the one who implicitly values life, destroying the life of another, that's another discrepancy of the values i.e while you value life you are now acting towards destroying life intentionally.

Q: You are trying to conceal that fundamental value.

Nm: Not explicitly. No, that's implied in it. You might not even completely think about it at all. You're not intentionally trying to conceal it.

Q: We are then born into that kind of concealment, we are born not knowing wholesome and unwholesome.

Nm: You're not born with fully developed concealments. But as the Buddha said, all the underlying tendencies for those concealments are present in a newborn. So they will grow and develop.

Q: The ignorance that we start with, it's not something that we decided to do.

Nm: Basically ignorance is part of the way you attend to things. It's implicit in it. You know, when you attend to something, you automatically have to ignore something else, you cannot attend to everything. That's the principle of avijja, in other words, by looking this way, you will not be able to look at the other way simultaneously. So which is the most common way that people choose to look? Well, it's the way of least resistance. It's the way of sensuality. It's the way of ill will, it's the way of passion, desire, satisfaction. So it's the way of "with the grain", "with the flow". Simply attending to that "way" means you're not attending the other way. You cannot attend both at the same time. You have to find a good reason to start looking "upstream" and then start swimming upstream, while everything is trying to pull you downstream.

Q: Can you say that, that which is unwholesome is that which goes against the way things are?

Nm: Yes, but I don't like using the term "the way things are" because that has been overused and is quite mystified already. It would be better to say that "it goes against the universal principles" i.e the Dhamma. And you need to understand the Dhamma to know what those universal principles are. You can have an idea of what nature's law is and then infer from there what is wholesome, but that's on the level of an abstract view,

which can correspond to the practical application to some extent. Some people can have an accurate abstract view but haven't truly understood the nature of wholesome as wholesome.

Stealing

Q: If we can just go to the next precept, which is to refrain from "taking that which is not given". How is stealing unwholesome?

Nm: First of all, you can see that you cannot accidentally break the precepts. The perception is the fundamental factor. If you perceive that something is truly yours, and you take it because you perceive it as yours but it happens not to belong to you, it's just a mistake, there's no stealing involved. Stealing requires your intentional effort to override the truth, which is what the discrepancy is. So intentional effort to override the value of life, which is implicit, even if you don't think about it, or intentional effort to override the value of ownership, which is implicit, but you choose to ignore it. That's why these things are unwholesome. If you choose to act with intention of ill will, desire, carelessness, means you're accepting that contradicting value.

Sexual Misconduct

Q: The next precept of refraining from sexual misconduct or having sexual relations with people you shouldn't e.g another's wife or underage persons etc, is again misappropriating things that do not belong to you.

Nm: You perceive it as not yours, as something that shouldn't be engaged with, and then you choose to give priority to your

desire and ignore the factual basis of your perception. And why is passion or desire a contradiction? Why is that desire, a contradiction on the existential level? What is the discrepancy there? Desire is always towards sense objects. Whatever you desire, it's going to be one of these six sense objects. Can you have any of those six sense objects without the senses being there, without the mind being there, can you have sights without the eye? So what is the nature of the senses?

Q: They're not mine.

Nm: How can you then cultivate the desire for that which you can only get on account of things that are not yours. The only way you can cultivate desire towards those sense objects is to take these senses to be yours, to begin with. So you can't have a desire towards sense objects without implicitly taking up the ownership of the senses. Taking up what's not yours, starts on the level of welcoming desire. Desire arises and by welcoming it, you take up desire and every value that that desire implies. The value is that senses belong to you, that they are in your control, enjoyable, and not dangerous.

Q: You're acting from a premise that these senses are mine, safe, secure, and delightful.3

Nm: That's all implicit. You can't ask for the desire to not manifest itself. You have no say in that. But you have a say in your ATTITUDE towards the manifestation of desire or ill will. Are you welcoming it, delighting in it? Are you rejoicing in the prospect of fulfilling that desire? Even if you practice sense restraint, are you still entertaining the phenomenon of desire in your experience when desire manifests? And if you do, that's why you're still contradicting yourself on the existential basis

because you cannot possibly entertain the value of desire without implicitly taking up the ownership of the sense bases. If you stop valuing the sense objects, stop entertaining desire towards them, you get to uproot the taking up(assumption) the sense organs as yours.

Q: Basically, you have a desire towards sense objects because you've misappropriated the senses.

Nm: Yes, it's like a vicious circle. Because you appropriate the senses, as in you don't question your ownership of them, that's how you cultivate desire towards the sense objects. Because you cultivate desire towards sense objects, that's how you appropriate the sense organs. So one feeds the other. Therefore, first, you need to start restraining your behavior on account of the desire towards senses objects, as in you need to start keeping the precepts. And then once that becomes your norm of behavior, then you can get to see that on the mental level, you should now stop delighting in it, welcoming it, flirting with it, even if you know you're not going to act physically. And then eventually, you will dry out from that wetness of desire, and then you get to see the true nature of those senses which is perilous.

However, you can't just say okay, I'm not regarding my senses as mine anymore. Because that thought of your senses is a sense object. You cannot directly experience your sense organs, which is why they always have implicit ownership that you need to undo indirectly. You can't just decide to let go of them, because you're not holding it intentionally. So, what is the thing that if you let go of will result in you not having ownership of the sense organs? It's the desire towards sense objects. Letting

go of that, you're a step closer to letting go of the sense organs which you cannot perceive, and if you think you can, that is because you are conceiving them, which is not what they are.

You get trapped by sense organs because you pick up the bait of the sense objects. Your desire is you picking up the bait and thus getting trapped. Therefore, to no longer be trapped, you must simply no longer pick up the bait, and then INDIRECTLY you will no longer be appropriating the sense organs as yours. (You cannot directly let go of sense organs.)

Lying

Q: The next precept is refraining from misrepresenting the truth.

Nm: The fundamental lie is avijja. Would you be able to be complacent, lazy, dull and careless, if you were placed in a dangerous situation that you perceive as dangerous? It would be inconceivable for you to relax on that level, to completely just let your mind melt away and forget about itself. And yet here you are in the most perilous situation you can be in, being subject to death, sickness, aging. And yet you are completely complacent. It's the fundamental contradiction, the hardest one to undo. Because it's not as obvious as desire or ill will.

For example, if you want to do a little experiment, if you're not sure if your existence in itself is dangerous, just lock yourself in a room, a comfortable room But don't engage with any distraction for a day, switch your phone off, switch everything off, don't talk, and don't step outside. Just sit alone on a chair or a bed and stare at the wall. And let's see how long you can do that before you start freaking out on account of that boredom.

So if boredom is not truly dangerous. Why are you afraid of it? Why do you constantly need something to keep yourself engaged, to swim so that you don't sink? Why are you terrified of solitude and loneliness? Just think, if you get sick and can't move, can't distract yourself with all these things and projects. How will your mind remain? Will it be unaffected by that or will you start completely losing it? So let the boredom endure. And it's going to turn into full-blown anxiety and dread, and why is that if existence is not dangerous and perilous, where does this anxiety come from? Because you haven't done anything by the way. You're in a perfectly safe environment. Locked, nobody can get in, safe as you can be. And yet here you are freaking out internally. Because that's what your existence is, it's all these efforts and actions you do, to enable yourself to ignore that very nature.

Imagine somebody comes and tells you that you have ten minutes to live. Would you continue laughing carelessly, watching movies, or playing games? It will be impossible for you to do that. Because suddenly the sense of urgency is back, and the only reason a sense of urgency can be restored is because it's always there implicitly. That thread of anxiety that you can never completely cover-up is for everyone what human existence is. Only the *Arahant* is completely free from it.

When you are young, healthy, and have all the senses working, it feels like there's no problem. As I said, just do a little experiment, close yourself in a room for half a day and see what will happen to your mind when there are no distractions available. And if your mind was problem-free beforehand, this will not cause any issues, yet it does. Solitude starts revealing the main motivation for all your various engagements, which is

to cover up your underlying anxiety on account of your fundamentally uncertain existence.

Intoxication

Q: The fifth precept, refraining from intoxicants, is unwholesome because it's the basis for carelessness, it's the covering up of any mental clarity that one has.

Nm: Yes, can you possibly engage with intoxicating substances without implicitly endorsing complacency and dullness of your mind? Inconceivable. I don't necessarily mean getting drunk, I mean that simply by engaging with that substance, to whatever extent, you are increasing dullness of mind, which always results in increased heedlessness. Dullness means loss of context, loss of perspective, even if you're not drunk, it's still the direction of losing context and perspective, even if it's half a step.

Can you engage with the absolute minimum level of intoxication, without valuing it, without delighting in the prospect of the dullness of the mind, preferring the pleasure of numb distraction? Can you be engaging with that direction of intoxication if you see it as dangerous? Can you put one foot inside the lion's den, when there's a chance that the lion is right there by the entrance? You wouldn't flirt with that idea at all. A little bit of poison is still poison. It doesn't affect you like a lot of poison would, but it's still a poison which affects you, which means that it might be enough to kill you.

Remember you're already full of wrong views concerning everything, in regards to desire, in regards to ill will. For all of that to be undone there is a lot of work to do, and yet here you

are flirting with the things that directly result in increasing those wrong views. So yes, literally a glass of wine might be enough to fully cement you in the wrong view that sensuality is not bad. And because of that, you will not get the right view and you will remain bound to samsara, for eons to come. Is the glass of wine worth that risk? Do you really know there is no risk?

Q: When you are intoxicated with life, health, and youth, you don't consider the inherent risk.

Nm: Yes, you don't consider the context, which is that you might be healthy, alive, and young now, but can you guarantee that there will be the next breath? No, you have no guarantee of that. When you fall away from recognizing that context, you go into the direction of desire towards sense objects, towards intoxication with the world. You cannot have both, you cannot be absorbed in/ intoxicated with the world while maintaining a clear, dispassionate, mindful perspective. Thinking that you can is the result of your intoxication with the sensual world. Thinking that you are seeing clearly while you are intoxicated is a contradiction.

169hh- The Context Of Your Suffering

MN 121:

> **"His mind enters into that perception of forest and acquires confidence, steadiness, and inclines towards it. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of village, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of people, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of forest.' He understands: 'This field of perception is empty of the perception of village; this field of perception is empty of the perception of people. There is present only this non-emptiness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of forest.' Thus he regards it as empty of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: 'This is present.' Thus, Ananda, this is his genuine, unperverted, pure, emptiness."**

You can use the perceptions of the forest to establish your mind so that you're not bothered by anything in the village. It's not the actual perceiving of the forest or staring at a forest and repeating to yourself that it's a forest, which is usually the popular way of doing meditation. It's quite the opposite. It's about being able to establish the perception of the forest when you're not in the forest. That's how it's done rightly. Which

means it's not an actual perceiving on the level of your five senses, it's on the level of the mind, which you discerned and became familiar with, while you were in the forest.

Your mind is then established upon a context (peripheral awareness), of the circumstances and environment which provides a basis for more particular action. So even though you might be in the village, if your mind refuses to abandon the context of the greater forest, your time in the village, is only going to be minimal because your mind inclines towards the context which it has developed, which happens to be the forest.

If you develop the context of the forest, no particular sight, sound, smell, taste, touches from the village will be able to affect you, because the mind still perceives itself based on the context of the forest. But if you get careless and forget about protecting the greater context, you will start giving into particular sight, sound, smell, taste, touches in the village, you will drop off from the context of the forest and your senses will pull you all over the place. So, once you are established upon the greater context of the forest, all you need to do is guard your senses on a particular basis as in, just don't intentionally go with the unwholesome, and the context of the forest will be maintained.

If you understand this principle, you can go even further, for example, what's an even greater context than the context of the forest? When you look higher, you can find or uncover (not create) the context of the earth, planet earth, element of earth, call it whichever you want, whether you're in the forest, whether you're in the town, you are on earth. But as I said, to truly start developing the context of the earth, you will need

serious renunciation concerning particular things in your environment. How can you develop or transcend a greater context, when you still refuse to let go of the lesser? If you develop a mind upon the context of/sign of earth, it would result in you not even regarding your own body as belonging to you. And that's why the Buddha encouraged it. Contemplating the four elements will result in dispassion towards this particular manifestation of material form which is within the greater context of earth.

Whenever you look at this body, it's made of the same elements that everything else in the world is composed of, which means, all of that is inferior to the great basis of the context of earth that provides these elements. So I'm saying this because sometimes people can think that simply by thinking about the great earth, they're developing the context, but you will know you're developing the context, when concern for your own life and body, senses failing, sickness and so on, disappears. In that sense, you could see how the context determines the extent of your perception. The extent to which the perception of the earth is developed defines everything particular that comes your way as to whether you're going to be affected by it or not.

You can continue to develop even more refined perceptions than the earth, such as water, fire, air, the four colors, the infinite space and consciousness which is the most refined of them all, because it's the context of simple presence, whether it's suffering that's present, happiness, perception of the village, etc, all have in common, ‘presence’, it has arisen.

But you don't have to develop (discern clearly) all these different extents/contexts, the extent of earth can be enough for

final liberation. Because to properly develop the context of the earth, you will have to abandon everything inferior to it, such as any sense of ownership concerning this particular insignificant little body. You can see how all these great mountains here are already greater than your body. They're going to be here longer than you. They've been here longer than you ever will be. Yet, it's through not seeing that context, not allowing it to endure, not knowing how to maintain it in the background of your mind, why you get pulled with particular senses, perverting the whole picture, whereby you are the center, you are the context.

For an unenlightened mind, the five modes of being or the contexts of the five hindrances, determine the particular actions. Would you be able to engage with sensuality, if the context of sensuality is not pushing you that way? If you haven't given in to the pressure of the context of sensuality, would you be deciding the particular acts towards sensuality? No. But then at the same time, if you were not doing the particular acts of sensuality, would that context be maintained? No, because it needs maintenance. You need to be engaging in sensuality to maintain sensuality. That's why sense restraint has to come first. You stop maintaining it so that you can discern the general Nature of things which are general perceptions that you can use to abandon inferior ones, and they don't require your doing. ‘The Nature of things’ does not require you for it’s maintenance, unlike the hindrances.

What is the Nature of things? It's the context of things. And the Dhamma is the universal context. And what's the most universal about anything? It's that it has arisen on its own, that it cannot provide that lasting satisfaction of ownership and

because of that, it cannot be owned. Anicca, dukkha, anatta are universal contexts. The highest context is, ‘I can't own anything even if I want to’. And that context can become your mode of being through the clarity of comprehension you developed regarding it. Nothing particular then will be able to sway you or disturb you. Because you don't even own this body, let alone anything that can come through the senses.

So, for example, if you truly understood the fundamental context of anicca, regarding everything that has a nature to manifest that's *sotapatti*, which is the understanding that “whatever has the context of arising, because of that, has the context of cessation”, and the context of non-ownership, non-appropriation, indifference, dispassion, all these other contexts come from that realized/developed fundamental context of anicca.

How can you discern/develop/realize such a context? The only method is learning what the context is and then making an effort to discern it.

170hh- How to Develop Solitude

Q: The Buddha encourages the development of seclusion. What then is the best way to cultivate it?

Nm: You need to start exposing yourself to seclusion because you're not going to prepare yourself for seclusion if you never spend time alone, or if you're always socialising. Being ready for seclusion cannot come out of that because it's completely the opposite. So as helpful as people can be, for one's well being. Needing others is a compromise. Whether you're a layperson or a monk doesn't matter. But when I say needing others is a compromise, I'm speaking specifically about needing others for your existential well being. That's a massive compromise and a huge risk if you never grow out of it.

We are all owners of our actions, nobody else is responsible for your actions. What you do stays with you. No other person can help you with that or take away from your burden or add to it. It's always on you, your intentions, your decisions, your actions will always stay in you. You are bound with your actions and the subsequent results. So, existentially, you're alone whether you want to be or not. And the recognition of that existential principle is where the practice starts. The experience is always me and others. Even if others are your closest friends, partners or relatives, it's still others. You can have very close others but for you, it's still just you. And when it comes to your feelings, your intentions, your responsibilities, they cannot be shared among the group.

Q: I can tell you how I feel but I cannot give you my experience of feeling.

Nm: Yes, the dimension of your feeling is inherently inaccessible to me. In as much as my feeling is inherently accessible to anybody other than me. As I mentioned before, solitude is not optional, existence is not optional. Existence is solitary and that's why if somebody wants to overcome and undo *Bhava*- the existence, you need to start recognizing the inherent principles of it. So for as long as you don't leave the group, how can you develop solitude? How can you see through it? How can you discern that neutral feeling that the Buddha praises, for which solitude is required?

Most people who are not used to solitude, when they are left alone, boredom is the first result. Which is a lot more problematic than one might initially think because if you stay with your boredom, it starts turning into a restless panic, fear, anxiety. And that's when you realize how much you actually depend on your perception of others around you. How much you depend on that in order to conceal that inherent nature of your existence, that you are alone and fundamentally, that you're not in control. That's why most people are so terrified of boredom, because their whole existence, their whole lifestyle goes against that nature of existence, that you are not in your control, that you are alone. So that's why every little reminder of that is frightening for people who are not used to it.

Of course, you can't expect to just jump into solitude overnight, because you could legitimately lose your mind but at the same time, to use that as an excuse to never do it and never prepare yourself for it. Well, that's equally ignorant. So you want to

recognize "Okay, I'm not ready to jump into that extreme solitude right away. Which means I should make myself ready because what do I think death is? Is it any different from cessation or cancellation of all my means of escape from myself, cancellation of sensuality, cancellation of company, cancellation of all my distractions?!". That's why death is the ultimate terror for an ordinary person (*putthujana*) who is fundamentally, existentially dependent upon others, upon sensuality, upon distraction.

Some people use examples of others who jumped into solitude and lost their mind, as proof that solitude is unhealthy. Well, that's just non-wisdom speaking. A person can do it too quickly, which means they must just slow down a bit. You don't have to abandon the goal of solitude just because you don't know how to develop it correctly. Whether you go too fast or too slowly, it does not compromise the quality of the goal, which is the delighting in solitude.

Whether it's a layperson or a monk, doesn't matter, you review your mind, reflect upon and see whether you are ready to live in solitude? Without having anything to do, without having any interactions for the majority of my day? Would I be able to just be with myself? Or would I have to extra commit to some sort of meditation technique to manage solitude? Would I have to keep finding things to do so that I don't drown? Do I delight in solitude, am I at ease in solitude, do I prefer it?

Delighting in solitude takes work. But this shouldn't be confused with someone who 'delights' in solitude on account of their inability to cope with others or because they hate others. Those

are wrong reasons and they're going to become obvious to whoever goes into solitude.

So ask yourself, "Am I ready for this?" No. Okay, so as a layperson, you should really start preparing yourself for it, even if you never go into complete solitude or ordain etc. You will get sick, you will die, your senses will fail. How do you think it feels when your senses fail? It feels like you're being confined more and more into one solitary box. That's where the Buddha gave that simile of the four mountains coming closer and closer from every direction and eventually crushing you, as in you have less and less space to move, less and less possibility of engaging with senses, which means less and less possibility of maintaining the domain of sensuality, the domain of distraction.

If your whole life is about avoiding that, but at the same time you think you're practising Dhamma that's a complete contradiction in terms. I'm not denying that being with others can be beneficial, or that a group of like-minded people can be helpful. But it's beneficial in as much as a school is helpful for somebody who's learning a craft, but the school can't do the craft for you. If you can find a person who is equal or superior to you, then go and learn from them, instead of associating with somebody who you can't learn anything from, even on the pretext of Dhamma.

Q: It says in Samyutta Nikaya 45.2:

> **"Venerable Ananda approaches the Buddha and says:**
> **"Venerable sir, this is half of the holy life, that is,**

good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship."

"Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda! This is the entire holy life, Ānanda, that is, good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship. When a bhikkhu has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path.

"And how, Ānanda, does a bhikkhu who has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path? Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu develops right view, which is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. He develops right intention... right speech... right action... right livelihood... right effort... right mindfulness... right composure, which is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. It is in this way, Ānanda, that a bhikkhu who has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path.

"By the following method too, Ānanda, it may be understood how the entire holy life is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship: by relying upon me as a good friend, Ānanda, beings subject to birth are freed from birth; beings subject to ageing are freed from ageing; beings subject to death are freed from death; beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair

are freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. By this method, Ānanda, it may be understood how the entire holy life is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship."

Nm: As you can see, the Buddha describes what he means by "*kalyāṇamitta*" (good friend), which is not someone who is just nice to you but someone who assists you in the cultivation of the Noble eightfold path, even if you haven't met them, just as we haven't met the Buddha, yet our entire holy life is determined by him.

Even though 'friendship' with a Noble one is essential (even just to the extent of hearing their Teaching second hand), still solitude plays a significant part in development, it's not negotiable. That's why the Buddha would encourage the monks with the right view to go into solitude, to go to an empty hut or root of a tree. And the person with the right view will actually do it rightly. They wouldn't be using solitude for any wrong reasons. So if you wish to develop the necessary ability to go into solitude, you shouldn't expect that ability overnight. But that doesn't mean that you don't start preparing yourself for it. If you want to develop mental strength or any form of strength, you acknowledge your weakness, then you realize what you want to develop. But avoiding solitude and developing random company instead, would be the equivalent of recognizing your weakness, and then using that as a justification to yourself that you shouldn't develop strength in the first place and instead should develop more of that weakness because that's truly the strength you seek.

171hh- The Beautiful side of Ugly, the Living side of Death

Q: AN 7.49:

> **Bhikkhus, these seven perceptions, when developed and frequently practised, are of great fruit and great benefit. They are included in the deathless and bring the deathless to its conclusion.**
> **What seven?**
> **1-The perception of the ugly,**
> **2- the perception of death,**
> **3- the perception of the other side(paṭikūlasaññā) of food/eating,**
> **4- the perception of non-delight in regard to the whole world,**
> **5- the perception of anicca,**
> **6- the perception of dukkha in anicca,**
> **7- the perception of anatta in dukkha.**
>
> **These seven perceptions, when developed and frequently practised, are of great fruit and great benefit. They are included in the deathless and bring the deathless to its conclusion.**
>
> **1- When the perception of the ugly is developed and frequently practised, it is of great fruit and great benefit. That is what I said and in reference to what was, it said?**

When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of ugly, and often lives with such a purpose, his mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse, and either upekkha or the other side/pāṭikulyatā (the opposite direction of what the mind is attending to, paṭikkūlamanasikāram, I believe is a synonym for yonisomanasikaram,) gets established.

Just as a chicken's feather thrown into the fire shrinks back and shrivels. In the same way, a Bhikkhu whose mind is accustomed to the perception of ugly, and often lives with such a purpose, his mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse. If a Bhikkhu whose mind is accustomed to the perception of ugly aims at sexual intercourse or does not have the other side(patikula) established. He should know " for me the perception of ugly is not developed, for me there is no difference in former distinction, for me, there is no strong development." In that way he considers.

If however, When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of ugly, and often lives with such a purpose, His mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse, and either upekkha or the other side (patikula) gets established." He should know " for me the perception of ugly is well developed, for me, there is a difference in former distinction, for me,

there is a strong development." In that way he considers.

Bhikkhus, When the perception of the ugly is developed and frequently practised, it is of great fruit and great benefit. It brings the deathless to its culmination and conclusion..."

The term "*paṭikūla*" is usually translated as 'repulsive' but it's literally the 'other/opposite side'.

Nm: It's the side that is simultaneously there with the beautiful. And in order to discern it, you need to see through the beauty that is present. The opposite side of beauty cannot be found somewhere else. Like, two sides of a coin, you don't seek a second coin to see the other side of this coin. It's the same coin but now you need to see the opposite side, the one you're not looking at. And the reason why that's so important is that the most common way people practice *asubha* is as a response to the beautiful, as in, they want to get rid of the beautiful and replace it with the ugly. Which means you see those things as separate from each other. You're not seeing the ugly within that beautiful, which is how you would cancel(undermine) the attraction to the beautiful, by seeing the opposite side of it (within it). But instead, you're just trying to get rid of the beautiful because it bothers you and replace it with ugly because that supposedly does not bother you or it shouldn't bother you as much if you want to practice restraint. But in reality, what you're doing, is just acting on account of how you feel.

So the beauty is there bothering you and you just want to be free from bother, which is fine. But how do you go about it? You

go about blaming the beautiful for the disturbance. Which means you don't really know where the bother is and it's not in the beautiful. The lustful attraction is not in the beautiful. It's in your attitude towards it.

Q: Because you don't see the nature of that beautiful thing that's why you're attracted to it.

Nm: Exactly, and you will not see its nature, because now you think "the attraction is in the beautiful, so all I need to do is replace the beautiful with images of ugly, and then I'm free from attraction". No, and that's exactly what happened to many monks who were practising wrongly. They started getting attracted to the ugly, to the disgusting things, to corpses and so on. Because they were wrongly attending.

The right attention it's how you attend those things, within them. So while beautiful is present, you have a chance to discern correctly, '*yonisomanasikara*', to attend correctly, to attend to the opposite side that's there implicitly. Which is why freedom from the side that is beautiful is possible. You don't have to do anything in response to it, you just need to see through it. And that's why, if you actually develop that '*patikulamanasikara*', it then doesn't matter, what type of beautiful perception you encounter, later on, the mind remains equally developed in regard to it, the mind sees through it, because it has seen through its nature which is universal. And when you see through the nature of beauty, as inseparable from ugly, then you realize that the beautiful is just less ugly, not as ugly, but still ugly. Which means it starts serving as a basis for dispassion.

Q: So how do you cultivate the perception of ugly or these other perceptions that the Buddha has encouraged? How would you establish your mind in the ugly right now? How would you do that? How would you discern the opposite side?

Nm: You need to check your mind," Is there lust here now?", as in, is there presently enduring attraction to beautiful, right here, right now? Then the answer is no, but then, could there be lust in your mind, as in, in the future, "Is my mind liable to become attracted again to something of sensual nature?"

The point is, you want to recognize that the possibility of lust, aversion, delusion, manifesting in your experience is already the lust, aversion, delusion, in your experience, just on a subtler level. How would you know this possibility of lust arising in the future unless that possibility of lust is already present right here, right now, which is how you know it.

The possibility of lust is there because the basis for lust is there, you haven't abandoned it. So circumstantially, you're not particularly, experiencing any lust right here right now. But the whole basis, the whole domain of being liable to lust is still there. You haven't abandoned it. So can these things arise in the future? Yes, means you're presently maintaining the basis, and when the conditions are right, lust will arise on account of the basis that is being maintained.

What is the basis for lust arising?

Q: Valuing of pleasure

Nm: Exactly, so you're not engaging in any sensual pleasure now, yet you're maintaining the view that that pleasure is

valuable. Which is enough to maintain the basis for future lust to arise. However, if you see the extent of the danger of that wrong view that pleasure is valuable, you will free yourself from sensuality. As the Buddha once said, "For as long as I did not understand the extent of the danger in regard to gratification, I did not claim to be fully free from sensual desires. But when I understood the danger, then I understood the escape, then I claimed to be fully free from sensual desires".

So within the beautiful, the opposite side of the beautiful is the danger defined by that beautiful. The danger is the attraction to the beautiful which is based upon the *asubha*/ the ugly.

The development of that perception of danger means the discernment of the implicit characteristics of what you are attending. The chief of those characteristics being the danger. Having discerned the implicit danger long enough, you will not need to maintain that perception because it's not something that you created, it's something that you have uncovered.

Q: The sutta continues:

> **"2-... When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of death, their mind draws back from attachment to life, and either upekkha or the other side gets established...**
> **(continues as above)..."**

Nm: The perception of death is the counterpart of this life here, you can't just get rid of life in order to see what death is, which is how people usually practice, *asubha*, get rid of the subha and then replace it with *asubha*.

So 'the other side' means that it's there simultaneously present at the same time within whatever you're attending. Death is simultaneously present as the other side of life. Even if you don't attend to it necessarily. You're not attending the fact that you're alive, you're just taking it for granted. That doesn't matter, in its nature, death is implicit. And it wouldn't be implicit if there is no life. In the same sense, the ugly would not be implicit if there were no beautiful.

So instead of following the direction that taking your life for granted, offers, you start discerning that - whenever there is life, death is implicit. You will then experience disenchantment with life, and it will be impossible for you to remain attracted to it.

Q: The result of seeing death then is that whatever is happening in life won't bother you because the passion for it has been removed.

Nm: Yes, because passion is not the product of life. Passion is the product of you thinking or having a view, that life is yours, that life is in your control, that life is not subject to change, that life will not end, that our life will last forever. All those are implicit notions that you have towards life. And hence passion.

If you remove the misconceptions towards life, there is no longer a basis for passion. But, again, as I said, you cannot remove the misconceptions by denying life. You cannot remove misconceptions about the beautiful by trying to constantly get rid of it and deny it. You remove misconceptions by allowing beautiful to endure and then seeing through it.

If a sensual thought manifests, it says in the suttas that one must " obliterate it, destroy it, get rid of it...etc". But how do you do that? It doesn't say that you must deny its existence. No. You get rid of it by not welcoming it, by not delighting in it, by not entertaining it. That's how you get rid of it 'indirectly', so to speak. You get rid of the sensual thought or you get rid of the intoxication with life, by not carelessly welcoming it, delighting in it, entertaining it. So when it arises on its own, you must not welcome it, which doesn't mean that you must go out of your way and try and chase it away. No, you must just make sure that you remain mindful of not welcoming it with any gesture, and if you do that long enough, the thing will go away.

Q: And again, you don't have to go and seek out death or possibility of death because it's already there.

Nm: If you seek it out, it means you still imply with your view that the problem is in those individual things that you're now seeking out to prove to yourself that you are not subjected to them. Just ask yourself, "Am I subject to this?" Yes. So what is there to seek out when it's already here? Can future lust manifest in me in the future? I'm not sure, means yes. Unless you know that it can't, that's the basis for - Yes it can. So if you seek out individual examples of lust to prove to yourself that you're not lustful, means you're lustful, and you still think the problem is in those individual things that you perceive, not in your mind of welcoming, delighting, entertaining.

So you can ask, am I subject to death? Will I be affected if my life were to end next second? Yes, there you go. I don't know. There you go. You will. So how can you then free yourself from death without denying life by seeing the danger in life and

removing slightest passion towards life, while life is still there? And then you know, it's the passion that kept me bound to life, that keeps you subject to death. Not life in itself. Hence freedom from life is possible without needing to die. And that's why when you do die as the Buddha would say, you will not be reappearing anywhere else. Because you have severed any bond with the entire domain of samsara.

Death is where life is, if you remove passion towards life, there is no basis for death to apply to you any longer.

Q: The sutta continues:

> **"3-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of the other side(patikula) of food/eating, their mind draws back from craving for taste, and either upekkha or the other side gets established..."**

Nm: Your ignorant default mode is that you prioritize the pleasure of eating. That's what you put first. So even when you're starving, losing the sight of that as the reason for your eating, you will be automatically eating out of pleasure for the taste, not because of the need for food.

The 'other side' of the eating is that it's 'something you have to do'. It's a necessity. But by taking that necessity for granted, by covering it up as a necessity, you then get picky, you start preferencing tastes and start acting out of tastes. But it doesn't matter how much you act out of taste, it's still within the necessity. You still need to eat. That's the horrible thing.

The pressure of eating is there, but you ignore that because you take food for granted and then on account of it you develop the

priority of tastes, the priority of pleasure. Which is fully within that necessity. So all you need to do is uncover the fundamental need so that you see it as that which comes first and tastes as second, not the other way around. By covering up that need, that pressure, that hunger, that unpleasantness of being subjected to it, you put joy for the taste first, you put pleasure first. If you don't ignore the fact that food is a necessity that you're presently subjected to, whether you're starving or not, you will then not lose the context of why you need to eat. No matter how agreeable or disagreeable the eating is, it's still within the unpleasant fact of hunger. So when the hunger disappears, you stop eating.

Q: In the Dhammapada verse 203:

> **"Hunger is the foremost illness; Determinations are the foremost dis-ease. For one knowing this, as it really is; Nibbana is the foremost ease"**

Nm: Hunger is an affliction and your way of dealing with the affliction is not freeing yourself from being liable to affliction altogether but in just finding the pleasurable aspects of affliction. So you're not dealing with it, you're just managing it, covering it up.

Q: So that enjoyment of taste, cooking, recipes etc, comes out of putting that pleasure first and putting that 'other side', that necessity of food second.

Nm: It'll be impossible to make the effort towards taste if you are dispassionate towards taste on account of seeing the necessity first. That doesn't mean that you will not taste if something's agreeable, it just means that it would be impossible

for any amount of agreeable or disagreeable taste to disturb your mind or to pervert the right order again, by putting first which is second and putting second which is first.

Taste is always second to hunger, but for you, the taste is the first, craving is the first, everything else is second, you even forget that you eat out of hunger. Which is why people eat when they're not hungry because the pleasure of taste is now the criteria. Doesn't matter how refined the criteria you might have developed, it's still within the need of hunger. If there's no need for food, you wouldn't be engaging with food.

173hh- Dukkha in Anicca, Anatta in Dukkha

Q: AN 7.49 continued:

> **4-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of non-delight in regard to the whole world, their mind draws back from the various beautiful things in the world, and either upekkha or the other side gets established...**

Nm: The perception of non-delight is for the uprooting of the inherent delight or joy in regard to the world, senses and sense objects, which is developed by seeing the danger of delight. The word 'delight' refers to that subtle attitude of acceptance or looking forward to something, towards things that are pleasing and agreeable, which are not a problem in themselves. The problem is you being unable to NOT delight in the prospect of pleasure. 'Delighting' means not seeing the inherent danger. If you're seeing the inherent danger in things you are not delighting in them or you will stop delighting. But this non-delight doesn't mean that you hate delightful things, it's just that you will not delight in whatever is agreeable. So if it's agreeable, it's known as agreeable but there's no delight. If it's disagreeable, it's known as disagreeable but there is no resistance to it, which is the opposite of that delight.

Q: You end up no longer attracted to the beautiful things in the world.

Nm: And not being attracted, doesn't mean that beautiful things in the world cease to exist. And by the way, you can't just fabricate non-delight out of thin air. You can only practice non-delight by preventing yourself from delight. And the only way you can prevent yourself from delighting is by contemplating and maintaining the context of the danger in things that you are delighting in. So if you cultivate non-delight, and if you do that long enough, then you don't have to constantly keep reminding yourself of the danger because the danger is inherent in those things. That's why freedom from those things is possible in the first place. And it's by not seeing the danger, that you build up the delight, so to speak, in the course of your lifetime/s.

You can abandon things that are non-essential, like agreeable sight, sound, smell, taste touches, you can restrain from and can say no to all of it. Because you know, the delight in them is bad. But that still doesn't mean you understood the delight simply by saying no to these things, because there are certain things you can't say no to, such as eating. And even the Buddha as a bodhisattva tried to starve himself to see if that would be the way to complete freedom. And he realised that actually, it isn't. It was being done for the wrong reason. In other words, the food was never the problem. So things that you can't just say no to, such as food, that's where you have to practice developing that context of danger in delighting, not that the food you're eating is dangerous, but your delight is the danger that keeps you bound to these aimless wanderings of samsara. And then if there is no delight in food, you wouldn't care what you're eating, good or bad, because however you eat, you eat for the right reasons, And that's what the Buddha said in MN 77, in regards to eating:

> **"Suppose, Udāyī, my disciples were to respect me because I eat little. Well, there are disciples of mine who eat a cupful of food, or half a cupful; they eat a wood apple or half a wood apple. But sometimes I even eat this bowl full to the brim, or even more. So if it were the case that my disciples were to respect me because I eat little, then those disciples who eat even less would not be respectful towards me..."**

He continues in that sutta to debunk ascetic practice in itself as worthy of respect and instead explains that he is respected because he shows them the path out of suffering. His disciples know what is important and what is not. And the quantity or quality of food is not important. Whether you delight or not is important. And If you understand the way out of delight, you wouldn't care if the person who taught you that freedom from suffering is eating six bowls of food etc. Whatever circumstantial action [which is not based on greed, hatred or delusion] that the Buddha did, cannot invalidate the truth of the Dhamma, that he taught them and that they understood. The point is, that if you judge a book by its cover, you will put the cover first and the message of the book second. Even if the ‘cover’ of the book deteriorates, and doesn't necessarily uphold the greatest standard of ascetic practice, if the message is impenetrable to criticism and has made you free from suffering, then the cover is profoundly inconsequential.

You can measure your practice, not by how much you can go without food and how harsh you live and so on. You measure it, by seeing how free from ‘delight’ you are, how clear you understand the nature of delight, and how apparent perception of danger in delight is.

Q: "5-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of Anicca, their mind draws back from acquisitions, honours, and fame, and either upekkha or the other side gets established..."

Nm: The other side, the counterpart to acquisition, ownership, fame, is the true understanding of that non-ownership or impossibility to own/ anicca. Anicca is change. But just saying “everything is changing” is not personal enough. You want to see that, “Yes, everything is changing, but so am I, my experience, my ownership, my body, my senses, my feelings, my life, that is also SUBJECT to change”. So that's why I'm saying that anicca is not about ‘seeing impermanence’because you can't see the impermanence of your life unless you're dead. But then you can't see it. So if you wait for death, to show you that your life is subject to change then it's too late. And that's the whole point, saying that something is ’subject to change’ means the possibility of change is inherent within it without that thing having to change.

Understanding that things are subject to change, subject to suffering means understanding that you should not wait for things to change to try to understand anicca. You want to understand it while it's not changing, while your life is there, You want to understand that it's overall and fundamentally going to change because it has arisen.

The nature of change is that nature of non-mastery, non-ownership, impossibility of control. You can control things within their arising, while they're present. You have a say in your life now, but fundamentally, you will not have a say when

that life decides to change, as in when you start dying or when you die.

In terms of acquisitions, they escalate into honours, which escalate into fame, which is all the escalation of your sense of self. And In the course of practice, a monk would first remove the coarsest layer of conceit such as sensuality and anger, but then later on in the practice, he will be removing subtler acquisitions of his nationality, clan, family, cultural identifications etc

As for fame, it is inherently accepted and liked by people. Lack of fame is inherently feared by people. That's why people irrationally fear blame, even if there is no rational basis for the criticism, just because there is criticism at you, you're already defending against it, you don't want it. It takes a developed mind to not do that, to see through ‘the worldly winds’, and all of that comes from the simple appropriation of the very things that are in front of you, your very experience, these five aggregates, the feelings, the intentions etc. But if you contemplate that, not by saying ‘this and that is impermanent’, but by seeing that this experience is because my body with its senses, is here operating and I cannot do anything about that, it is subject to change and I am fundamentally not in control. I can move, I can say yes, I can say no, I can look this way. But all of that is within the non-control. All of that is within the basis that I have no access to, the basis of my aggregates. So, when they change, my entire domain, my entire world and life of control will be swept away with it. And when you can recognize that, through your experience right now that is in your ‘control’, you can recognize that fundamentally THIS is all subject to change. That's it, you don't have to wait for it to

change, you don't have to make a change to prove to yourself that it's subject to change. You just need to stop acting out of it unwholesomely and discern that whether you want to or not, 'being subject to change' is implicit. That's what a thing is.

If you cultivate that perception of anicca, sustain it, maintain it in its being (*Bhavana*), it would result in complete fading away of all the acquisitions, dependence on honours, fame, notions of conceit.

Q: The mind will also not be upset by criticism.

Nm: What other people will think about you, justly or unjustly, ceases to be your concern. You will not lose perspective on account of that irrational fear of blame.

Q: And the pressure to make sure that others have the correct view of you...

Nm: ...that's gone as well because that's rooted in your conceit.

You cannot control other people's opinions of you. Many people can understand that. But one thing is to understand that on a rational level, and another thing is to let that rational level settle in so that you're emotionally undisturbed in regard to blame and criticism [emotionally you cannot be touched, let alone mentally revolve around it]. And that's why you will be unable to lose perspective. So if somebody criticizes you, you will be absolutely clear about where they're coming from. And you could see if they have a point and you were wrong in that regard. You wouldn't have a problem admitting it either, because you're not irrationally defending your conceit, your gratuitous ownership. Equally, if they criticise you baselessly,

you realize that's absolutely ridiculous, or simple untrue or their criticism completely misses the point, and you wouldn't feel pressure to correct them and rectify the world and make sure that everybody knows the truth etc.

Q: **6-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of DUKKHA in ANICCA, an acute perception of fear/danger becomes settled in him toward indolence, laziness, slackness, heedlessness, lack of effort, and unreflectiveness, just as one would have fear towards one's executioner with a drawn-out sword...**

Nm: The perception of danger needs to be established, the perception that change of an unfavourable kind can occur at any time. Once you recognise the weight of that situation, you will feel the discomfort which is inherent in the fact that your very being is not your own. In other words, if you recognise anicca correctly, you will be recognising the inherent discomfort of your situation, the dukkha will become apparent. And the clearer that perception is, the more of a’sense of urgency’ will develop.

Q: **7-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of non-self in what is Dukkha, his mind is devoid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit regarding this conscious body and all external objects; it has overcome 'all measurements due to conceiving'(vidhāsamatikkantaṃ) and is peaceful and well liberated...**

Nm: "Measurements due to conceiving" means what you conceive you appropriate. You are measured/defined by the

things you appropriate (take as "mine"), such as your form, feelings, perceptions, intentions and consciousness. When those things change, you are thus affected. Removal of the conceivings on the other hand, means that whatever happens with the things you used to conceive will not affect you anymore. You will no longer be "measured" by it.

183hh- Becoming An Immovable Object

Q: What is the middle way between asceticism and sensual indulgence? Is it the practice of enduring (neither giving into or denying) thoughts?

Nm: That's the way to cultivate the middle way.

From the context of thoughts or mental images that appear in people's minds, sensuality would be the acting out of thoughts immediately without reflection, without sense restraint, or any consideration. That's pretty much what defines sensuality.

> **"Thought and lust are a man’s sensuality,**
> **Not the various things in the world;**
> **Thought and lust are a man’s sensuality,**
> **The various things just stand there in the world;**
> **But the wise get rid of desire therein."**
>
> – AN 6.63

The nature of thought (mind state) might be sensual, but when it's paired with acceptance, welcoming, and delight in it, there's immediate acting towards it. The opposite way would be, for example, if you see sensuality as a problem and then you try to deny those thoughts. You see that you act out of sensual thoughts and then think that not having those thoughts would be good and so you try to prevent them from arising, which is the other extreme of self-mortification, the ignoble way of self-torture. It's ignoble because it cannot bring about the result you want. Trying to resist thoughts is not bad but denying thoughts requires you to take things further. One thing is resisting

thoughts, allowing them to endure, and resisting you acting out of them. Another thing is to think that you mustn't have these thoughts, to begin with, that would be you over-reaching because that's not up to you. That's why giving into those thoughts or trying to deny them, you remain equally ignorant, bound with sensuality and self-mortification, you are bound with the bait that Mara has laid down. So how do you then not go into these extremes?

Sensuality and self-mortification can result in extremes but in themselves, it's relatively subtle in the beginning. You denying thoughts is not exactly extreme, yet it partakes in the direction of self-mortification, it shares the same nature. All of the acts of self-mortification that would come later on in someone's practice, of such a kind, would all be sharing the same principle in common, which is a denial of the arisen thought, "I mustn't have it!", and initially the Buddha was the same when he was trying to find a way out.

There is no end to asceticism, you can always do more, even to the point where the Buddha tried to stop breathing so that he wouldn't have unwholesome thoughts arise, but he realised that that would not work either.

People tend to dismiss EXTREME asceticism or extreme sensuality and think as long as they do not commit to those extremes then they are in the middle. No, if you are either overly accepting your thoughts or denying them, you are not in the middle. The middle way is the way that can discern the arisen thought, not act out of it, and not try to get rid of it. Which means that the mind already needs to have been developed sufficiently enough to allow the thought to endure

without jumping into the action on account of it. Therefore sense restraint needs to be developed beforehand, virtue needs to be established because that will give you a certain space to not automatically act out of thoughts.

Patient Endurance Allows For Wisdom.

The beginning of right discernment is being able to allow thoughts to endure without welcoming them. Thoughts arise on their own, that's the whole point, and thinking that you can deny them already implies a wrong view, whereby you think that you are in charge of those thoughts, or that you are responsible for their arising. No, you are responsible for their acceptance. You are responsible for delighting in them and acting out of them. If you don't do these things and thoughts are still there, that's not on you, but the reason why people still want to get rid of those thoughts is because it's unpleasant to allow thoughts to endure without acting out of it. It's easier to act towards sensuality and it's easier to deny. The hardest thing is to allow it to endure and not act out of it, because it can endure for days, and when you're not acting out of it, that whole pressure and emotional charge is there. It's easier to get angry and lustful, just to say yes or no, act and express yourself quickly to deal with the pressurizing thought. It's easier, but again, the only reason you are doing that is because the endurance(manifestation) of the thought is first, which means that no matter how much you try to give in or deny it, you always do it on account of that which you are not in control of, and which bothers you. In other words, all of your efforts to act towards or deny the thought are futile.

If you want to deal with the painfulness of an enduring thought, when you are not acting out of it, you need to allow it to endure so that you can understand it.

There is no wisdom arising on account of sensual behavior or self-mortification (indulgence and denial) because you just lock into a direction and that's your principle of action, i.e if it arises you just say yes yes yes, or no no no, and then you conflate that with the idea of purity which makes you feel extra superior on account of your great determination. And then you will realize that even the unwholesome states that you wanted to abandon, the conceit, ego, pride, get amplified instead of abandoned. So whatever the thought is, whatever the state of mind is, you have to allow it to endure, and just ask yourself, whatever state of mind you are now in, did you create it, did you press an internal button which produced it? No, but because you think it is yours, you try to engage in it or deny it. The problem is not in those thoughts arising, the problem is in you acting out of it, either towards or against, either way, you are affirming its grip on you, by your attempts to wiggle out of it.

Allowing thoughts to endure without acting out of them, would be the beginning of the middle way. Also, that's exactly what grasping the 'signs of the mind'- *cittanimitta* means in the suttas. Grasping the sign of your mind for what it is, its nature, the way it endures. The reason why people cannot grasp the *cittanimitta*, the prerequisite for the right view, is because they either act toward or deny their mind. So you're either under-doing the restraint or over-doing the restraint, but you are not doing the restraint properly either way.

Q: When you are watching the breath and a lustful thought arises, some tend to think ‘I must get rid of this’ therefore I must just watch my breath so that I don't have lustful thoughts, and if I can keep watching my breath I will never have lustful thoughts again.

Nm: That's like the deer herd that ran on top of the mountain (Mn 25). They are not experiencing any temptation from the bait, for some time, but they are not growing wisdom regarding overcoming the bait altogether, which means when their food on the mountain runs out, or when you can't sustain watching your breath 24/7, something will have to pull you out one way or another, and then you are back to where you were before, because no wisdom was developed, which would have created an elevated ground for you to be on. When the suitable environment, which was allowing you to not engage with the bait disappears, you get trapped once again because your freedom from the bait was only circumstantial.

By the way, there is no problem if you have lustful thoughts when you are breathing and you attend to the breath. You can do that because it is a matter of choice. The problem is when people choose to attend the breath with the view of denying the thought. Not as in ’I will attend my breath and allow these thoughts to endure in the background of my mind because it has arisen on its own, I didn't invite it, I will allow it to endure as long as it wants, I will not give attention to it, I will attend to my breath", but rather one should not think "I will attend to my breath so that this thought is gone, I will do away with it, it doesn't exist!!!!", if you think like that, you are engaged with the thought and your breath is secondary because this lustful thought is now your main concern. Like in the suttas when

Mara comes and tries to tempt the Buddha. The Buddha can't chase him away, he can, however, not provide Mara with a basis on which to latch, and that's when Mara leaves him alone. Thoughts of sensuality arise like flies buzzing around you but unless you provide something suitable for them to land on, they will just buzz off elsewhere.

In the suttas, it says that one should sometimes not pay attention to unwholesome thoughts (MN 20), but you shouldn't do that at the expense of denying their presence, which has arisen on its own. And it's because they are present, that you don't give them your attention. I wouldn't have to 'not give you my attention' if you are not here. So if I am instructed to not give you my attention, it means I KNOW that you are here, and for the duration of, or endurance of your presence here, I will not give you my attention, but I will not pretend that you don't exist in the hopes that you will disappear, that's just wishful thinking and you are just denying the presence of the thing which you had nothing to do with. That's how Mara traps you, affirming or denying is his domain.

Q: Is it about being equanimous regarding a lustful mind state?

Nm: That would be the outcome of cultivating the correct attitude long enough, whereby Mara will leave you alone. The pressure will not be able to overwhelm your mind, but not if you just cultivate sense restraint by itself. That's just the necessary basis to see the middle way, the basis for you to stop denying thoughts/ states of mind, but instead allow them to endure so that you become stronger than those states, so to speak. Through having them endure and not acting out of them, not losing your sense restraint, and not trying to deny that

which you are restrained against. In other words, cultivating the middle way will eventually lead to equanimity, immovability, etc.

Q: Those mental states will be less intense.

Nm: Yes, but that's more of the side effect. Your concern should be that ‘you are not moved by those states even if they last forever’. As the Buddha said "be like earth, water, fire, air, that are not affected by things that are thrown on them, etc..."(MN 62)

If you want to make that a practice, that is done on the level of the mental states, ask yourself "What mood am I in? How is that mood affecting my action? Am I lashing out? am I binge eating? Am I irritated? Am I seeking sensuality? Am I express ing these things? Am I being moved by these states of mind? If yes, that means I do not see the mind for what it is, I don't see its nature, I am not grasping the sign of the mind correctly. The sign of the mind is the enduring state of mind that you didn't invite and that you shouldn't delight in it, but just see it for what it is, an enduring phenomenon. When you start seeing that, you are already understanding the mind to a greater degree.

You will inevitably start doing this practice wrong, but you have to start somewhere, just don't take your starting place at face value, take it with a pinch of salt, so to speak. Whatever you are doing, even if it makes sense, don't immediately think that you are right, just keep testing to see if it's correct, keep reflecting on just how perturbed you are when lustful thoughts arise. Remember, when you do start you will be starting on your own terms, which is the wrong way to start, but you have no other way than that, but you have to start somehow. You don't have to

fabricate your experience to contemplate it but rather, it's more like just finding the state of mind that's already there.

You want to remove this idea that you are 'doing' the observation of the mind and start seeing the mental states as already there. Why are you even able to observe a mind of lust or anger? Because the mind is already that, you find it there already enduring as such. So whether you are doing awareness of mental states or not, doesn't matter, what matters is not losing that peripheral state of mind that's enduring, whether you look at it or not.

Q: What to do when you have a peaceful state of mind?

Nm: You can do the same. Don't be negligent, or distract yourself from it. If it's peaceful, then question it also, "Did I create that peace, do I know where it came from and when it will go?" No, I am subjected to it. It's agreeable and so let me not delight in that agreeability of mind, so that when that changes I will not be affected by it, and then equally when the state of mind is disagreeable, you will not crave against it, which means it's not affecting you much, which means you don't have to be fretting over it, trying to get rid of it. And that's the problem, that it's affecting you, not that the state of mind arose.

Q: The goal then is to not be affected by any state of mind...

Nm: ...And seeing that the state of mind is discerned on the peripheral level, not on the level of your attention. The mind is on the level of sense organs, not sense objects. What you attend is sense objects, sights, sounds, smells, taste, touch, thoughts, but the state of mind is what's peripheral to that. For example, you can't have angry thoughts if the mind is not angry. If you

have angry thoughts, then you can know that the state of mind which endures is a state of anger, and at first, it will feel ambiguous because you want to have things clear cut, where you can easily attend to it, but that's the behavior of the untrained mind. Training the mind to the sight of the peripheral image of the mind is what developing cittanimitta is i.e seeing the mind for what it is, without over attending it, without under attending it, and forgetting about it.

Q: If you cannot see it, then you cannot endure it.

Nm: Exactly, not seeing it means that you are either resisting it or indulging it. If you have a view that you shouldn't be enduring the mind, you will never see it, as in if you have the view that you should be denying those thoughts, that represent the state of mind behind them, you will not be able to endure it because your view is to not endure it. Or if you have a state of mind that you habitually act out of, again it's because you cannot endure it. Even if you cannot attend properly in that peripheral manner to your state of mind (*yonisomanasikara*), the only way that you would be able to do so is if you start enduring whatever emotional mood you are in, not acting out of it and not trying to get rid of it.

Sensuality is bad, so don't act out of it, but that doesn't mean that you try and remove the thoughts that are there, because that means you're engaging with it. You need to become immovable regarding that which moves you, not try to get out of the whole situation and try to move that which moves you. That's impossible, because how can you go out and move that which moves you without being moved.

The only way to become immovable/ unaffected is to stop interfering with that which disturbs you and stop being moved by it while it's there. You are moved, by acting out of it or trying to get rid of it. So allowing thoughts/ state of mind to endure, if they are pleasant, then the endurance will be manifested through you NOT acting towards that pleasure, and if it is unpleasant, the endurance will be manifest through you NOT trying to get rid of it. That’s the middle way.

185hh- Samsara Is Directly Visible

Ask yourself can you stop your feelings? Can you stop your form/rupa from deteriorating? Can you prevent perceptions from besetting you? Can you not choose?

Q: What is samsara?

Nm: Samsara is usually translated as rebirth but it literally means “wandering on” (to move about continuously). It's a translation which makes the meaning clearer because rebirth implies this life, the next life, and an in-between place which is just me passing through from one life to another. However, you are not being reborn, it's more like you ‘still are’ just here and there continuously on and on.

> **"Again, Udāyi, I have declared this method to my disciples. Fallen to this method my disciples could recollect the various manifold previous births. Such as one birth, two births, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, an innumerable forward cycle of births, and an innumerable backward cycle of births and an innumerable forward and a backward cycle of births. There I was of such name, clan, disposition, supports, experiencing these pleasant and unpleasant feelings and in such a life span. Disappearing from there was born here, with such name, clan, disposition, supports, and experiences, feeling these pleasant and unpleasant feelings in**

such a life span. Disappearing from there is born here. Thus they recollect the various manifold previous births. Udāyi, it is like a man who would go from his village to another village, and from there would go to another village, and would come back to his own village: and it would occur to him. I went from my village to that village, there I stood thus, sat thus, said this and kept silence thus. From that village I went to the next village, there I stood thus, sat thus, said this, and kept silence thus. From that village, I came back to my village. In the same manner, I have declared the method to my disciples fallen to which, my disciples could recollect the various manifold births such as one birth, two births----Thus recollect the various manifold previous births..."

– MN 77

You are here now and then you are somewhere else without these memories and recognitions, but similar aggregates and point of view, it's just a wandering on, like you go to sleep and wake up another day, then you go to sleep and you wake up like an animal. I'm overly simplifying it but only because sometimes reflecting on samsara can have an impact on people, in the sense it brings up a sense of urgency regarding the practice because if you speak about rebirth it sounds like it's just out of your hands, it's just how the universe works, you just come and go here and there, but the birth itself is not the beginning.

Imagine now for instance if someone were to offer you to restart this life, go back and become a toddler without being

able to keep all of your memories of everything that you have been through, that all has to be erased, would you go through the same ordeal again, just in this life that you already know, let alone in a realm that you are not familiar with? When you think about it, you realize that the appeal would only be if you can keep your memories and then you can restart the same life again, and that's really how many people think about rebirth as though they take things with them and just better themselves through rebirth, but no, it's just a memory-erasing but you are still there, as though someone were to wipe your memories and you start again without the knowledge from your previous experiences. Would you want to do it again? It would make you think twice because you might make even worse choices than you already have. In a nostalgic hindsight, your experiences of your daily pressures can seem quite pleasant but when it's there it's never pleasant.

The Buddha said, there is nothing that you haven't been already. Beings have been samsara for so long they have been everything, a mother, a father, a killer, the killed, every animal, etc. The tedious repetition that you have no memory of is basically what samsara is. You can realize that this life is already samsara, this is already that wandering on, it's one of many wanderings, and the actions you choose which will be the directions in which you will wander on later. That is why beings are the owners of their actions, the choices you make, and the things you do determine in which direction you are headed.

Q: Is samsara something which encompasses us?

Nm: You are not in Samsara, it is not a universe that you inhabit, it is your experience as a whole. What you have now is what samsara is. In the same sense that you can recognize certain tedious repetitions of day-to-day things, just extend that into infinity, extend that into the next life and the next life, and so on, perpetually just repeating because you forget. As the Buddha said, if someone can remember their previous lives, their previous wanderings, the directions that they have been in, all they will remember is these five-assumed-aggregates that they have now. Those aggregates are your experience as a whole, which is matter, feeling, perceptions, activities/determinations, and consciousness, there is nothing outside of that. Samsara is the aggregates which are bound with ignorance which keeps being repeated until you make the effort to uproot that ignorance.

> **"...When recollecting thus, bhikkhus: 'I had such a form in the past,' it is just a form that one recollects. When recollecting: 'I had such a feeling in the past,' it is just a feeling that one recollects. When recollecting: 'I had such a perception in the past,' it is just a perception that one recollects. When recollecting: 'I had such determinations in the past,' it is just determinations that one recollects. When recollecting: 'I had such consciousness in the past,' it is just consciousness that one recollects..."**
>
> **– SN 22.79**

Q: The content of one's experience changes but the general nature remains the same?

Nm: The content changes while the aggregates remain the same and that's the whole point. From that village to the next, the point is that you are still wandering on, so it's not metaphorically speaking, samsara is already here, it is what this life already is, a wandering on, I mean ask yourself, can you stop your feelings? Can you stop your form from deteriorating? Can you prevent perceptions from besetting you? Can you not choose? Can you just switch off your consciousness? You have no say in these aggregates they are just coming and going, taking directions. That's already what samsara is. You don't need the belief or proof of next life because you are already not in control of these aggregates and they are already taking directions that often you don't even want to go in and which forces you to have to endure things. Right here is the samsara, you don't get it more direct than that. So yes, death is not the end, and birth is not the beginning, it's just like a rearrangement of the same thing, another way of repeating it. You don't need the memory of previous lives or a special insight into future lives to see samsara as wandering on which is something which you are already fully engaged with as we speak.

Q: Samsara is something you are subjected to?

Nm: Yes, you are doing it and you can't just stop it, because that would be another choice within the samsara, another choice within the aggregate of sankhara. Can you not choose? Can you abstain from not choosing without that being another choice? You can't, you are fully within it, so you have to do it. Can you not feel? Is that even conceivable? Can you imagine your existence in the most abstract terms without a form or a body or some kind of enduring thing there? Impossible,

inconceivable. You are fully under the weight and control of the aggregates, you can't stop them, you can't tell your aggregates to go this way or that way, but you can start making the choices of a wholesome kind as opposed to an unwholesome kind, and in that indirect manner improve the state of your situation.

If a person starts to practice sense restraint their mind will develop more patience, more calmness, more self-composure and strength and that's already something which would make this wandering on in this life much more endurable and agreeable as well. Is being impatient pleasant or unpleasant? It's very unpleasant when you want something that you cannot get, or you don't want something but you can't get rid of it and you have to endure it, you're not patient. Is patience given or do you develop it, either by circumstances forcing it upon you whereby you have no choice or actually if you foresee it and start making effort in the direction of developing patience? That's just one example, so by making choices of a wholesome kind in this life, by not pursuing sensuality, not being careless, and disregarding others, not being immoral, and harmful to others by making that effort to keep yourself in check, you are developing patience, which means that the endurance of this samsara you will be able to tolerate it even more, the pressure as well, because you developed that tolerance. Tolerance needs to be developed, it's not a god-given quality. If you invest effort in it, it will grow, if you don't it will shrink, and then you will be even more pulled by the desires and your wandering will be even faster and more hectic, more distracted like an animal. And that's why when a rearrangement of this form occurs but your mind was pretty much a mind of an animal, that's the form that you are going to be assuming and that's what the

Buddha said, if someone behaves like an animal in this life, that's going to be their destination.

The body is a means of engagement with the world and sense objects, so what you chose to engage with, the way you choose to engage with your body, that's basically where your mind is heading, so next time you might get a body which is more suitable for the level of engagement you want or are choosing. If your mind was engaging with sense objects on the level of animal passion, madness and thirst, then you are going to get a body which is much more suited for that. That's why dogs have a smell much stronger than humans because that's how much more they are pulled by the sense objects. You might smell something nice but it won't make you lose your mind like a dog. If you don't make the effort and start giving in to losing your mind on account of sense objects, then yes you will get a form which supports what you want, what you keep choosing. If you develop choices which abstain from sense objects then you don't need sense organs, so when the rearrangement happens, so to speak, you will get much fewer sense organs like in the suttas when the Buddha describes the celestial type bodies which are more refined , you would not call them bodies from our point of view.

And again future life, previous life doesn't matter, what matters is to recognize the nature of aimless wandering on and that the aim you might have within that wandering on is fundamentally aimless, so even if you have a great mundane purpose in this life, means it's still mundane and will not change the state of this aimless wandering on, your aim is only relative and when the time comes for thing to rearrange, that aim will make no difference, in other words, you cannot prevent the form from

deforming, getting sick and dying that's inconceivable. You are on borrowed time every time.

If you want to have a simplified example of what would correspond to rebirth, it's not about being born again or dying, it's really about losing the memory and that's why beings are bound to constant repetition of the same thing because they have no recognition of what they have already done countless times. After all, if you remembered you would not want to do it anymore, you would want to leave that state of affairs. Imagine now that someone comes and wipes your memory, just the memory so your body is still intact, you are still alive but your memory and recognition of anything you know including yourself is gone. So for you, if you were to wake up from that state, although others would externally see that it's the same person, the same body, but from your point of view, the body and everything would be a new thing, yet it's not a new thing isn't it? It's a new thing from that internal point of view because you have no memory of it and that's exactly what rebirth is. It's just losing the memory and not realizing that the aggregates are not yours and they never were.

Ignorance regarding it has no beginning and that's why you should be concerned about death and dying because everything you learn even the wisdom you got unless it was of a significant kind will most likely not play much part and then all you can do is to focus on doing wholesome things because as I explained simply by cultivating certain habits in the mind, when your memory is wiped clean you are going to start using the body from the point of view of the habits you cultivated beforehand. You don't have explicit memories of the habits but the inclinations are there and those inclinations you are

responsible for. They are there because you have been choosing those things many times before. It doesn't just mean that you now just carelessly give in to inclinations, it just means that the presence of inclination is due to previous habits which then also means that you could reshape them.

If your inclinations are bad, you can double down on doing good in this life so that you develop good inclinations. So then in the next manifestation, those inclinations will be what inclines you or directs you without wisdom or memory to recall on. That's really what rebirth in samsara is, the repetition of habits without knowing that you are repeating the same old habits.

198hh- In The Seen Just The Seen

“What do you think, Māluṅkyaputta? The forms cognizable via the eye that are unseen by you—that you have never before seen, that you don’t see, and that are not to be seen by you: Do you have any desire or passion or love there?`` ''No, lord.”

“The sounds that are cognizable via the ear…”The aromas cognizable via the nose…“The flavors are cognizable via the tongue…”The tactile sensations cognizable via the body…“The ideas/phenomena cognizable via the intellect that are uncognizable by you–that you have never before cognised, that you don’t cognise, and that are not to be cognised by you: Do you have any desire or passion or love there?” “No, lord.”

“Then, Māluṅkyaputta, with regard to phenomena to be seen, heard, sensed, or cognized: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Māluṅkyaputta, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When

there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering."

"I understand in detail the meaning of what the Blessed One has said in brief:"Having seen a sight, (Having heard a sound, smelled a smell, tasted a taste, touched a touch, known a phenomenon...) recollectedness is forgotten when attending to the sign of the 'beloved'. He experiences an impassioned mind and he keeps holding. For him, with the arising of sights, various feelings increase. For him, the mind is spoiled by desire and irritation. Accumulating suffering in this way, Nibbana is said to be far away.

"He is not impassioned by sights (sounds,smells,tastes,touches, or phenomena...).Having seen a sight he is recollected. He experiences a dispassionate mind and he doesn't keep holding. For one seeing a sight like this, while practicing, feeling is exhausted, not accumulated. He lives like this, recollected. Diminishing suffering in this way, Nibbana is said to be nearby."

– SN 35.95

Can you have lust for things that you haven't seen before? That's inconceivable because 'having seen something' is a prerequisite for lust. You, however, are responsible for having lust towards the seen, and one of the reasons why a person would have lust towards the seen is because they take for granted that which is seen, they take for granted the sense

organs as their own, as the providers of pleasure and so on. So then whatever you see, it's only the thing you see, you are fully centered around that but if you stop and think about it, it doesn't matter what you have lust towards, just look at the context of that experience and reflect: “Ok, I have seen this, but which is more, things I have seen in my life or things I haven't seen?”. You will realise that things you see or have seen will always be less compared to things you haven't seen. Even when some things you haven't seen become that which you have seen, still there will always be more of that which is not seen.

Can you have lust towards that which is not seen? That's inconceivable. So the basis then, for non-lust is even greater than the basis for lust. By thinking like this, you realize that anything you have seen was purely circumstantial, you can realise: “I could have not seen it, it could have not been”. When you have that framework or that established context, anything else you see, will be seen against that context of “It could have not arisen”, and you realise you have no say in that thing arising, which in turn means that you will be less centered around things you see, much less absorbed in objects, which means your basis for the possibility of lust will be narrower. The loss of context, or being absorbed into a sense experience without any peripheral awareness in regard to it, that is where the lust breeds and multiplies.

Things you have seen are always secondary to things you haven't seen, which means that your lust for the seen is also secondary. Now, if you were to cultivate the recognition of everything that you haven't seen as a necessary basis for non-lust, it will be impossible for you to maintain the lust towards things that you are seeing here and now. Such a practice is the

undermining of that centredness upon things you have seen, heard, sensed, cognised, and when I say ‘centredness’ I mean that absorption in sense objects as a default mode of being. You need to start eroding that gratuitous perception and one of the ways is recognising that everything you have seen and will see, and seeing now, is fundamentally circumstantial because it's always against the backdrop of everything else you have not seen. That can put the current lust towards things you have seen in a better perspective.

If you develop the context that everything that has not been seen is greater, the desire for things not seen won’t matter anymore because you realise that it does not matter what you see in the future, it will always be secondary to the framework of everything else not seen. If you lust for new things, or things you have seen, that means you have lost the recollection of the framework, the bigger picture, you have obscured the context. It does not matter what you have seen, or how many times you have seen it, by being seen, it becomes second. By acting out of lust, you put those circumstantial things that have been seen, the centre of your experience, which means you become dependent on that which is already second. If you have lust, you are putting that which is second first. The first (more primordial or fundamental) is everything that is not seen, the circumstantial nature of seen, if you maintain that recognition, it doesn't matter what future seeing or possibility of future seen, it will all have to come within the framework of everything else not seen, and that's exactly how you can develop your mind above lust. You don't develop your mind above lust by never perceiving anything beautiful in the world, you develop your mind by not perverting that order ever again in the world, it does not matter what you see.

The absence of lust is greater, that's why it's possible to overcome sensuality because it's fundamentally second, likewise with non-hate and hate. If sensuality were truly rooted in the things themselves, things you have seen and the way you see them, it would not be a problem that you could free yourself from, but the reason sensuality is a problem is because it requires that perversion of perception, it requires that distortion, it requires wrong view, and implicit risk of commiting to that which is circumstantial.

Imagine someone offers you a new car to drive for free, but informs you that there might be a bomb rigged to it, it might explode. Would you risk driving that car? You wouldn't, because it doesn't matter the appeal of the object, you have the greater context/framework that there is a bomb that could explode, you realise that you would be basing your entire existence upon something entirely circumstantial and uncertain, whereby if that thing changes you will not be able to remain unaffected by it. By maintaining that context, it does not matter what you sense, you will not have lust towards it because the danger is apparent. You cannot have the context of the danger, the risk, the circumstantial nature and at the same time enjoy the object of that. The only way to enjoy it is to not see the risk. It's mutually exclusive. And it's not like you must now try and not see things, because if you maintain the right context, you will simply not seek sights out and if they do arise you will not be overwhelmed, afraid or trying to avoid it either. In the seen there will just be the seen, there will be no avoiding it or trying to prolong it, because in the seen there is now no more perversion of the context of the seen.

“...That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Māluṅkyaputta, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering.”

When you establish your being upon lust towards things, it defines you, as I said, your ownership, things that you are committed to emotionally, things you crave for, that is what defines you, that is what your sense of self is. In the mind which is already perverted with lust, one thinks: “'I am' is first”, and that's the most fundamental distortion that an ordinary person does, you think things are yours because you think you are, but it's actually the other way around, you are, you have a sense of self, because you keep owning things gratuitously and you keep owning them because you don't see them as unstable, you don't see them as subject to change, so even when the change happens blatantly in your face, you don't see that as undermining your ownership, because you assumed yourself to come first and independent. You just isolate these examples when change goes against you and undermines your ownership and sense of self and then try to cover that up by getting something new, like possessions, and that's why sensuality, a form of ownership and consumption is the only way an ordinary person knows how to deal with any emotional discomfort that he experiences, he doesn't know how to escape from painful feeling in any other way than turning towards

sensual feeling and trying to cover it up with new stuff. The fact is that things could change against your will and fundamentally they cannot be owned. By discerning that “subject to change” context, you will be unable to not include yourself in it as well, you will start feeling it. You start contemplating the vulnerable nature of your possessions and sooner or later you will feel the pain of dukkha when you touch upon something that is dear to you, then you start contemplating that as perishable, and you can realise that you yourself are also subject to that same perishing.

If you say, “Yes, the body is anicca”, unless you feel anxiety and fear on account of that, you are not doing or seeing it correctly or you might be an Arahant, but again then why would you be even listening to these instructions. The point is that you, your sense of self is because there is the taking things as ‘mine’ first, it's because every single time you engaged with the object of the senses you do so with ignorance, without the right context, without maintaining the recognition that they are vulnerable throughout the beginning, middle and end, it doesn't matter what point you engage with things, they remain in their nature, at their core *anicca.*

> **"...When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering..."**

That's basically just the proliferation of that self view because it grows infinitely, so by being defined by objects of your senses, by chasing the pleasure of these things, you become a being in the world of these sense objects. That's why a thought of sense

restraint, a thought of not chasing the sensual pleasure fills you with anxiety and terror. You realise that it will kill you. That's why even people who are not into Practice, when they chase sensuality - to the point where basically if they do not meet the required threshold of objects, they start experiencing very painful mental states. Equally, if you are not able to give in to that anxiety and be overwhelmed by it and refuse to engage with the sense objects to the same extent, then you are diminishing that gratuitously proliferated being in that world of sense objects, and you can do so by maintaining the *anicca* context of things you want to engage with.

After the Buddha gives those instructions, Malunkaputta says:

> **"I understand in detail what was stated briefly by the Blessed one. Having seen a sight, (Having heard a sound, smelled a smell, tasted a taste, touched a touch, known a phenomenon...) recollectedness is forgotten/confused(context is lost) when attending to the sign of the 'beloved'. He experiences an impassioned mind and he keeps holding...."**

Having seen a form without the context you would be confused, as in you are already putting it first as opposed to second, not seeing the right order. It means you are pulled by pleasure and as I said in the beginning of this talk, the way to not be pulled by pleasure is not to never see things but to never lose the context - the recognition of the right order. If there is lust, that means that there is the absence of context.

> **"He experiences an impassioned mind and he keeps holding (assuming)...."**

He is assuming it in the wrong order.

> **“For him, with the arising of sights, various feelings increase. For him, the mind is spoiled by desire and irritation. Accumulating suffering in this way, Nibbana is said to be far away.”**

Your mode of being becomes dependent upon the sights, etc. Which means that now whatever else you start experiencing, like feelings, you are just proliferating more and more. That's why if sensuality is not kept in check by circumstances limiting access to it, everybody would be an addict, and most people are addicts one way or another. What I mean is that it is not a static thing, where you can just enjoy sensuality and then restrain yourself. No, each time you enjoy sensuality that means next time you will need to enjoy more of it, your being grows towards it. You become more dependent upon it. It's not a static thing and that's the danger you have to recognise as well. People think “Ok, I understand this so I will restrain later”, but later might be too late, it might be too much. You only have a certain capacity to withdraw yourself from it and if you overflow that being of sensuality, you will not have means to get yourself out of it anymore. You became too dependent.

> **“…Accumulating suffering in this way, Nibbana is said to be far away…”**

It builds up and then even when a person with all of that piled up on him thinks about nibbana, he will think of it in terms of that pile up. In other words, for him nibbana will be another sensual thing, the greatest pleasure, the fulfilment of desire, which is just an extension of everything else that he has been chasing so far.

What a puthujjana thinks death is, that is closer to nibbana than what he thinks nibbana is, and that is why sometimes when the Buddha taught nibbana to some people they were upset. Nibbana is the death of your sense of self, your proliferated being upon sense objects. That's why the true practice, practically speaking, more often than not, will be unpleasant for people certainly in the beginning, because it's going to be about undoing that sense of self, not finding that last missing piece that will make you complete or help you abide in the ultimate joy of bliss forever. No, it's about undoing that whole stinky pile of sensual rubbish. And the more of that pile you accumulate, the more work you will have to do to clean it up.

Procrastination is carelessness and that will only accumulate suffering. For example, many people who read the suttas recognise what needs to be done, but keep absolving themselves from the sense of duty to do it, waiting for the right conditions, and that procrastination is not a static thing. For as long as it lasts, it will result in more things that you have to clean up. If you could not make yourself clean your room when it was barely cluttered, then because of that procrastinating, you will have 100 times more things to clean up,...good luck starting then.

> **“He is not impassioned by sights (sounds,smells,tastes,touches, or phenomena...).Having seen a sight he is recollected. He experiences a dispassionate mind and he doesn't keep holding. For one seeing a sight like this, while practising, feeling is exhausted, not accumulated. He**

lives like this, recollected. Diminishing suffering in this way, Nibbana is said to be nearby."

There is no craving being cultivated towards sense objects. He prioritises the context not the content of his experience.

199hh- The Uprooting Of Your Suffering

Q: Ajahn, you have said many times that the problem is that we are affected by things in the first place. In other words, it is possible for us to suffer, to get angry, lustful, confused and so forth. Thus the goal is to not be affected by suffering in the first place, rather than to only manage the symptoms.

Nm: That's the fundamental difference I often try to highlight. The practice of the Dhamma is not supposed to help you deal with things that bother you, it's supposed to uproot your liability to being bothered by things in the first place. The Dhamma does not manage your suffering, it removes the possibility for you to suffer in the first place. So the goal for your practice is to not be affected by things to begin with. It’s not about having a perfect management system that will always help you deal with whatever suffering arises.

And that's the problem already: suffering has arisen. You might be very skilled in dealing with it, but you are not skilled in not having it arise in the first place, and that's what should be your concern.

Q: When I get angry, I can find a method which can calm my mind.

Nm: That's how you start, you need to want to be free from anger to begin with and then inevitably your first effort will be how to manage and subdue the anger, but you mustn't confuse that for the actually practice of the Dhamma, which if done rightly will uproot the anger, so that there is no more burden for you to manage.

Q: Management is not the Dhamma.

Nm: It's an approximation of the Dhamma, but it's not the “one and only way” which results in purification of “being” (satipatthana), the way that removes all of the unwholesome. Management cannot do that, only that direct insight into what uproots suffering, greed, aversion, delusion works. The Dhamma is that direct, one and only path for uprooting the suffering, not the management of it.

The knowledge of overcoming liability to suffering, once and for all, is the Dhamma.

Q: I must then first recognise the fact that I am subject to suffering.

Nm: The wise man who leaves the household life for the homeless life, does so because he realises that he is prey to suffering. He knows it's inevitable. And you need to have that idea clarified so that you can see that it's the root of the problem. The problem is that suffering is possible, regardless of whether you are suffering now in regard to something particular. You must realise that even if you spend your life avoiding major sufferings, the fact is that you are still liable to suffering, you still have to make the effort to try and avoid it.

The Buddha was neither sick, old nor dying when he saw a sick, old, and a dead person, the “divine messengers”, yet he knew that he was liable to those things, and that is what the issue is.

The difference in management or uprooting is recognising that, “ok there is no lust etc in my experience right now, therefore I am fine”. No, it's good that those things are not present, but is it

possible for those non-arisen unwholesome things to arise? Can you address that now or are you waiting for tomorrow? That's the crossroads, are you headed in the direction of uprooting or management? Most people go down the road of management, thinking that they will deal with the problem when it arises, while failing to understand that the liability to future lust is already a problem *now*. You don't have to wait for a particular suffering to arise because the general liability to suffering is always present.

Is there a chance for non-manifested lust or aversion to manifest in my experience later? If you are not sure, that means that there is a chance, and that's the issue right now even if those things are not present.

It's a very common attitude for practitioners to think that if they are not lustful or angry most of the time, then they are doing fine. But if most of the time you are not lustful and angry, that means that lust and anger is still a possibility, which means you are just not acting out of anger as often as others but that's just because you learnt some management method and you are certainly not uprooting anything if you have the attitude that most of the time such things don't arise for you therefore all will be fine. If you ask yourself could they arise in the future and if the answer is yes, then you can know all is not well.

You have to train your mind to start seeing these possibilities of anger etc as actually present because they are actually present.

If your idea of "way out" of suffering is skillful management, that means that you need suffering to arise first. Management requires suffering to arise first in order to manage it, thus management cannot free you from that suffering, it can only

deal with it once it has arisen, and that's the relatively subtle problem, peoples naturally tendency is to manage the problem to try get rid of it but there is this confusion which occurs, which is that through your management of suffering you experience less dukkha and then at the same time you start tacitly assuming and hoping that all you have to do is manage your suffering long enough and then somehow your liability to dukkha will disappear. But that liability will not just disappear or evaporate magically and that's the point, the only way that suffering will evaporate is if you evaporate it, if you understand the core of it, if you pull the thorn out as the Suttas often say. It won't come out by itself, you have to uproot it. If you keep managing it with the hope that somehow your liability will disappear, that means your practice revolves around wishful thinking and there is no direct insight, no knowledge of what needs to be done for freedom from 'liability to suffer'/Dukkha.

You might do a method that calms you down from getting angry but that calmness is dependent on you maintaining those efforts in regards to what is bothering you and so when something changes whereby you do not have the ability to practice your calming method, you will be back where you started because your method was just a suppression of anger. And that's not inherently wrong to do in the beginning but it is wrong to adopt a view that management will uproot the unwholesome somehow magically.

The only way to uproot things is to directly see what uprooting is, and I just described what that is, which is to recognise that liability/possibility of anger, lust, delusion, suffering as the Dukkha right now. And you can only sustain that recognition if you are keeping the precepts and practicing sense restraint.

Q: So I want that possibility to be gone…

Nm: Then you have to understand where the dukkha is. Is the possibility in itself the dukkha? Is the unpleasant feeling that you have when you think these thoughts, is that the dukkha? Or is the dukkha the gratuitous resistance towards that mental displeasure?

You suffer because you resist discomfort even before the discomfort comes your way. You resist the thought of the possibility of discomfort here and now and that is why here and now you experience dukkha. That's why the Buddha did not say that feelings are the cause of dukkha, he said that craving in regard to what you feel is the cause of dukkha. So when you have a feeling and a thought about the present, future or past, it's your implicit attitude towards the feeling, either craving towards or away from it, that is why that experience is dukkha. And you would not see that if you haven't forced yourself to discern that that level of possibility of dukkha is dukkha right now, you would not have seen that if you were just fully bent on managing the dukkha as it arises, or managing the dukkha before it arises.

Even when people recognise the possibility of future dukkha, they can even take that as something to manage, thinking “I will do such and such so that these things will not happen to me”, which carries the implicit view that dukkha is in those actual things or in your actual feelings, and you don't see that it's in your attitude towards these things, presently.

The relationship between craving and suffering is always simultaneously present.

You need to see that the suffering is the present liability to suffering, not wait for a particular symptom of suffering to arise so that you can manage it. If you are not seeing your liability that means you are not seeing where your craving is. You need to see the present dukkha first in order to see its present cause. To the extent dukkha is felt to that extent craving is present but if you are not seeing the dukkha then how can you see that which determines it.

A way you can reflect: “why are you entitled to not experience pain? Have you had a say in its arising? Can you prevent circumstances from becoming disagreeable in the future? Is that even conceivable?” No, it's a complete fantasy which is rooted in this complete misconception of the problem being in these things happening to me and not in me implicitly resisting the idea of these things happening to me.

So how do you stop resisting the pain? How do you stop welcoming the pleasure? How do you remove craving?

By not trying to manage it and seeing it here and now already, and by sense restraint because you cannot possibly be welcoming the pleasure and just dealing with the unpleasant experiences when they arise, you can't just selectively choose which cravings you want. If there is any form of craving present means liability to suffering is present. So you have to abandon craving for pleasure in as much as you have to abandon craving against pain.

Pain appears, pleasure appears, you have no say in their arising, so why do you then constantly entertain the attitude of “I want this",”I don't want this", why do you go after the one

and try to avoid the other? Where is that attitude rooted? Why are you doing that?

You do it because you want to avoid pain, because you do not know how to deal with dukkha, your existential discomfort. That's basically management in a nutshell, and thats why its inherently wrong, even if you are doing the Dhamma, following the Buddha's instruction, if you are taking it as management, that means you are still maintaining the same attitude by which you suffer in the first place, which is “I can't handle this, I want to get rid of this” and that's the attitude of craving.

So can you withstand the pressure of a feeling? Can you withstand the pressure of a feeling if your physical behaviour is not kept in check? If you do not keep a lid on the lustful or angry outpours of your verbal or physical actions, can you possibly withstand things mentally? Not a chance.

How do you withstand the pressure? By withstanding it. How do you become stronger? By exposing yourself to things which will make you stronger. You train that strength out of which wisdom can arise, which is what enlightenment is.

Sense restraint is not optional, it's a necessary base which has to remain throughout. By not giving into the pressure, you get to outline what the actual problem is, which is your liability to future pressure and discomfort, and you can only see that by not trying to manage the pressure to get rid of the pressure.

200hh- Gateway To Nibbana

Often I speak about the endurance of unpleasant or pleasant feeling. So how would you practically do that? Or rather how would failing to endure the arisen unpleasant feeling, manifest for you? If something bothers you and you fail to endure it, how do you know that you failed to endure it? What qualifies as failure in enduring it?

It is when you are doing something on account of it or when you are acting out of it. Acting out of anger or lust that you fail to endure. Even though the action that you did was not sufficient enough to constitute a breach in your precepts, nevertheless, you know for yourself that YOU CHOSE to act out of lust, aversion or distraction. That's how you know you failed to endure the pressure of an arisen feeling.

Now what do you do in order to endure the pressure? You don't act out of it. The reason why I am saying this is because you might think that to endure the pressure you must be mindful of it, however that is wrong because mindfulness will arise from your choice not to act out of that pressure. It will arise depending on whether you act out of craving or not. But if you think “I must be mindful of this” you will be DOING the mindfulness, i.e. still acting out of craving.

That's why virtue and precepts come first. By not acting out of discomfort which resulted from an insult etc, you know that you are enduring it. However you might be enduring not acting out physically, but now you must not act out verbally and when you become skilled in that you will be able to endure mentally

not feeding any unwholesome thoughts. Which means that at any point throughout that proper way of enduring, you are mindful, by forcing yourself to not act out of craving. By prioritising the ‘not acting out’ you are by default cultivating mindfulness.

It's your mind that is choosing to act out of lust that makes you overwhelmed with lust. It’s not by having the lust arise on its own. Its mind choosing to accept or engage with ill will that overwhelms you. The arisen ill will which arises on its own is not the problem. That choosing is the gateway through which these things have to arise. You invite them in, you open the door by ‘acting out’. You don't have to worry about being mindful every second. No, you just need to be mindful peripherally, by not losing the sight of what you are about to do. For example, if someone comes to your doorstep and tries to pressure you to let them in. You are the one who chooses to let them in or keep the door closed. Sometimes many people arrive at the door and you cannot bear that pressure, so you open the door to try and chase them away, but by doing that you open the door and that's all they wanted you to do. They don't care if you open the door to let them in or chase them away, they just want you to open the door because when it's open they will find a way in. So often people think: “I must get rid of this thing”, so they open the door and engage with the lust or ill will and thus become fully involved with it.

Not opening the door is the endurance that I am speaking about. If there is unpleasant pressure, don't try to get rid of it. If there is pressure towards pleasure, dont welcome it. Just remain unengaged with it, keep the door closed, guard the gateway. You don't need to be policing what is arising for you or

what is pressuring you, or what hindrance is currently present. All you need to do is stay at the gateway because that's where these things will become a problem, and knowing where the problem is the necessary basis for any wisdom to arise.

The problem is not in something which upset me or in something I have seen which made my mind lustful. No, the problem is when those things arise, you have no idea where the gateway or the problem is and you are automatically acting out of it. You cannot NOT act because you do not know where the gateway is, because you just keep acting out of it.

The gateway which I am describing is the middle way, which you need to see as an option. Even if you still choose to act out or not, at least now you will see that the choice is on you.

By abstaining from opening the door for welcoming pleasure or by abstaining from opening the door for trying to get rid of pain, you are then choosing the middle way.

By choosing to not act out, you are choosing the middle way and then you will start to see it. That is why if you guard your mind correctly, you go above the five hindrances or anything that bothers you. You will realise that none of those arisen things are a problem in themselves. The problem is you being affected by them or involved with them from the gateway where you chose to open the door.

Enduring the five hindrances correctly, your mind will rise above them. It's not about preventing them from arising because it's not in themselves that they hinder you.They become hindrances because of your choice which you are

responsible for. Hindrances cease to be a hindrance but as phenomena they do not necessarily disappear altogether.

So how then do you practically not act out of these hindrances or these unpleasant things? What do you do right now? You don't lose sight of the gateway. By clarifying your responsibility of seeing the gateway you will not need to worry about what specific lust or annoyance will arise in the future, all you need to do is not lose the sight of this gateway here and now, because all these things can only enter through the gateway. By supporting the recognition of the gateway (and thus by developing the gatekeeper), you won't be supporting the cause of your problems, which is ignoring the gateway.

The gateway is your intentional choice to engage. Thus the entire Dhamma can be boiled down to the simple instruction from the Buddha: " Whatever you know is wholesome, cultivate it and whatever you know is unwholesome, do not cultivate it". Do it or not, it's a matter of your choice, and if you cultivate the right choices sufficiently enough you will get to understand and uproot the nature of lust, aversion and delusion, you will fully discern the gateway and be unable to lose sight of it.

202hh- Nibbana Is The Ultimate Uncertainty

Colloquially speaking, if something is determined it implies certainty and undetermined implies uncertainty. The highest undetermined thing is *Nibbana*, the phenomenon of *asankhata dhamma*. So from the point of view of an ignorant *putthujjana's* mind which depends on certainty, on *nicca*, on permanence, on taking things personally, *Nibbana* is the ultimate uncertainty, the most frightening thing. However, uncertainty is frightening only if you still take certainty for granted and 'put it first' (i.e you see it in the wrong order, rather than seeing that certainty is sought after only because of the basis of uncertainty which is first), you think that things are nicca and only occasionally *anicca* without realizing that they are always *anicca*.

Sometimes when people understood the Nibbana that the Buddha taught, they would become distraught, overcome with fear, because for them, that Nibbana meant death or that which would destroy them.

Alagaddūpama Sutta (MN 22):

> **"Venerable sir, can there be agitation about what is non-existent internally?"**
>
> **"There can be, bhikkhu," the Blessed One said. "Here, bhikkhu, someone has the view: 'That which is the self is the world; after death I shall be permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change; I shall endure as long as eternity.' He hears the Tathāgata**

> **or a disciple of the Tathāgata teaching the Dhamma for the elimination of all standpoints, decisions, obsessions, adherences, and underlying tendencies, for the stilling of all determinations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving, for dispassion, for cessation, for Nibbāna. He thinks thus: 'So I shall be annihilated! So I shall perish! So I shall be no more!' Then he sorrows, grieves, and laments, he weeps beating his breast and becomes distraught. That is how there is agitation about what is non-existent internally."**

Thus you have to train your mind so that the uncertainty of undetermined Nibbana, the dispassion of Nibbana will be the highest bliss rather than the foremost terror. You can do that by first cultivating virtue and sense restraint, and then if you want a contemplation theme that will approximate Nibbana, you can use the phenomenon of uncertainty. Examples of such contemplations can be found in the suttas:

Udāna Sutta (SN 22:55), and in Āneñja-sappāya Sutta (MN 106):

> **"It might not be, and it might not be mine. It will not be, and it will not be mine. I am giving up what exists, what has come to be."**

Maraṇassati Sutta (AN 6:19):

> **"Therefore you should train yourselves: 'We will dwell heedfully. We will develop mindfulness of death acutely for the sake of ending the defilements.' That is how you should train yourselves."**

The main characteristic of those contemplations is the recognition of that fundamental context of your existence which is always ‘uncertain’. You don't have to fabricate that truth, you just need to find it and remember it, and that's actually why you can sustain mindfulness on it because it's always true.

Uncertainty Is Always In The Background.

If you want to contemplate the phenomenon of *Nibbana* even as a *puthujjana*, then contemplate uncertainty, as in, start feeling it, contemplate that ‘your self is fully caged within Uncertainty’ (which is the ‘right order of appearance). The tendency for many people who try to practice *anicca*, is that they try to determine the uncertainty in things ’over there’, which means you are then just determining that which is undetermined. So when people go around saying that “everything out there is impermanent”, that is true, but that's not the *anicca* which matters. *Anicca* that matters is on the level of your existence, and if you understood it, you wouldn't be able to just say that your body is *anicca* and still be equally as ignorant and passionate as before. If you see that your body, your existence is uncertain, you will feel the threat of that fact. That's why *sila* needs to be established beforehand because most minds would not be able to bear the recognition of what *Nibbana* is. If the mind is strong enough on account of virtue, it will not get distraught in the face of that fundamental uncertain nature.

Everyone can feel that uncertainty, however, for an untrained mind it will feel like anxiety but for the trained mind that got used to it, recognized, and understood uncertainty, such a mind

will be at peace, because the anxious aspect of uncertainty is due to ignorance of it.

Enduring A Feeling Is Unavoidable

All you need to do is start practicing sense restraint and that will enable you to ‘endure feelings’ which is not optional, the only optional thing is HOW you endure it. From the start, your whole life is about trying to get rid of or get hold of feelings, and you do all that based on having to endure those feelings. But if you practice sense restraint and endure it on those terms, you still have to endure it, but the benefit is that it can result in wisdom. That's why the Buddha said:

Salayatana-vibhanga Sutta (MN 137):

> **" By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation joys, abandon & transcend the six kinds of household joys. Such is their abandoning, such is their transcending. By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation distress, abandon & transcend the six kinds of household distress. Such is their abandoning, such is their transcending. By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation equanimity, abandon & transcend the six kinds of household equanimity. Such is their abandoning, such their transcending."**

You replace one type of feeling with another because feelings are not optional. Whether it's the feeling of the householder or the renunciant, a feeling will have to be there, you are subjected to it and you will have to endure it. So that's why the WAY of endurance that you choose is important. Will it be the

way of welcoming, resisting, denying, or the middle way, the way of not acting out of craving?

The Undetermined Feeling

When one KNOWS a neutral feeling, it is then recognized as superior to a pleasant feeling, because pleasure pressures you to get more and pain pressures you to get rid of it. But with a neutral feeling, it is undetermined. You are undetermined and not pressured in a neutral feeling. The only problem with a neutral feeling is when you do NOT KNOW it. It's your ignorance of the neutral feeling that then pressures you toward distraction and delusion:

Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta (MN 44):

> **"Pleasant feeling is pleasant when it remains and painful when it perishes. Painful feeling is painful when it remains and pleasant when it perishes.** ***Neutral feeling is pleasant when known, and painful when not-known.*****"**

If you want to know and benefit from the neutral feeling you have to start restraining the delight in pleasure and stop trying to get rid of the pain by default. When you see the value in the neutral, you will see the value in uncertainty, in neither agreeable-or-disagreeable, the value in non-disturbance, the value in dispassion, in disenchantment, which most people do not see. For most people, passion is seen as good, it provides you with the drive for life, and that's true, that's the householder's joy, but to have that joy you must also be blind to the implicit danger in that thing that you are passionate about, because if you become aware of the danger, then you will

realize that it’s not worth clinging to or valuing, so then letting go is not a choice. When you realize that your passion is a trap, you automatically don't want it. The only time you get trapped by a trap is when you don't see it as a trap.

So contemplate being within uncertainty not as an object of your attention but as the background of your experience as a whole. Start seeing the characteristics of uncertainty, and if you develop in that way, you will force your mind to become dispassionate, and that's when the mind starts seeing clearly when the clouds of passion disappear.

The Context Of The Uncertain Body

Sabbe Sankhara Anicca- all determinations are uncertain. If determinations are uncertain then what is to be said about the things that the determinations determine. They are even more uncertain. So, *sabbe SANKHARA anicca, sabbe SANKHARA dukkha*, all determinations are uncertain and unsatisfactory, thus sabbe DHAMMA anatta - everything that is determined cannot be owned.

Practically speaking, determinations (*sankhara*) are things that are the basis for your ownership. For example, let's say you are attached to your house and family, the joy that you get on account of those things is determined by having the house and family. You can then say, if you are attached to your family, the presence of both yours and their bodies are now the basis for the entire emotional relationship that you have with your family, all the joys and griefs. Those emotional experiences would not be there if the body was not there, so the fundamental determination is the body. That's why if one

maintains the context of the body as the necessary basis for any experience in your life, with the recognition of Uncertainty of that determination/ that context, then whatever you experience based on that uncertain, unstable bodily context, is unownable. So your family will still be there and perceived but now the emotional basis for your ownership is gone because it's seen based on uncertainty.

It takes a lot of training to develop that level of clarity regarding the context of the body as a determination for everything. Most people wouldn't see that connection, they wouldn't see that the presently enduring body is that which determines all of their emotional joys and griefs that they get from some event in the world. If a person sees that the main characteristic of their body is uncertainty then it doesn't matter what comes their way, they wouldn't get emotionally upset because they cannot forget the container of uncertainty in which this is all happening. A great example of this is found in:

Nandamātar Sutta (AN 7.50):

> **“I don’t have only that amazing & astounding quality, venerable sir. I have another amazing & astounding quality. I had an only son: Nanda, dear & appealing. The rulers seized & abducted him on some pretext and had him executed. But when the boy had been arrested or was being arrested, when he had been imprisoned or was being imprisoned, when he had been killed or was being killed, I don't recall any alteration of my mind.”**
>
> **“It’s amazing, Nandamātar! It’s astounding, that you can purify even as little as the arising of a thought.”**

The mind that is established upon the undetermined, upon the uncertain as the fundamental non-negotiable basis, the Nibbana, will not resist the uncertainty because doing so is still within the uncertainty.

Your sense of self needs to have these determinations that you blindly take ownership of. The point to consider here, it's not about throwing away your possessions, but instead find things that you do own and through that sense of ownership start discerning the uncertainty of that thing. Initially, that will be felt anxiously, but once the mind is developed you will not suffer much on account of that anxiety, however, it's still the same route that you have to go down if you want to develop Nibbana.

The One And Only Path

Vitthara Sutta (AN 4.162):

> **“Monks, there are these four modes of practice. Which four? Painful practice with slow understanding, painful practice with quick understanding, pleasant practice with slow understanding, & pleasant practice with quick understanding..”**

Either way, it's the same path that needs to be walked, through the sense of ownership which is present you need to discern the uncertainty, and the mind which has developed samadhi will not be moved by that uncertainty, relatively speaking. Samadhi is not measured by how peaceful or blissful your meditation session was until the bell rang, it's measured by how much you don’t move in the face of uncertainty, sensuality, pain,

misfortune, etc. How much is your mind scraping at the walls to outrun the pain, or how much is it like a mountain that cannot be moved? Being immovable is *samadhi*. The beginning of the right *samadhi* is not being moved by the five hindrances or by the joys and griefs regarding the world. If you develop that, it's the *samadhi* of *jhana*.

Most people hope that if they do some technique of watching the breath and so on, they will get into *jhana* and then they will not be bothered by the hindrances or moved by the joys and griefs of the world, but as you can see, you have to do the work of not moving on account of the joys, griefs, and hindrances first and then the result will be the pleasure of the seclusion, which is where *jhana* is. The measure of samadhi is the immovability regarding any pressure whether positive or negative, but it's usually negative.

If you have no sila, you have no samadhi and will be completely overwhelmed if you understand what *Nibbana* is. The Buddha's teaching will terrify you, because from the *putthajjanas* point of view, “it is the death of me” and it is. If you invest the effort in sila, through such endurance you will be developing *samadhi*.

The necessary *samadhi* will be born from the work of your sila, sense restraint, abandoning the joys and griefs, and your cultivation of the context of uncertainty. In that way, you will force your mind to compose, which will have to result in clear seeing.

203hh- The Truth About The Five Hindrances

> **“Monks, there are these five hindrances. Which five? Sensual desire as a hindrance, ill will as a hindrance, sloth & drowsiness as a hindrance, restlessness & anxiety as a hindrance, and doubt as a hindrance. These are the five hindrances.”**
>
> – AN 9.64

The first thing to do is to clear up what the hindrances are not. They are not things that arise occasionally in you and they are not only present when your mind is attending to them. Hindrances in themselves are on the level of your currently enduring existence as a whole, as a basis for your world.

Only when samadhi is developed to the extent of jhana, has the mind overcome hindrances, everything else in your day to day life, even if you are not necessarily gripped by particular manifestations of lust, anger, and confusion, are still within the domain of the hindrances. They are on the level of your existential situation, and by that, I mean that at any given time you are either lustful or liable to lust, either irritable or liable to irritation, and so on. In other words, it's not like there are these five separate hindrances, rather, fundamentally you are within the domain of hindrances which is one thing. In the same sense, there are the five aggregates and then on account of the five aggregates as a whole, you can discern each of them. The same principle applies to the five hindrances which are the basis of an undeveloped, unenlightened mind. That base is exemplified

and manifested through one example at a time or the liability through one of them at a time. That's why surmounting the hindrances equals surmounting the world.

The first jhana is like surmounting the entire existential situation whereby now you are withdrawn and safe from lust and liability to lust and so on. This is important because as long as people think that hindrances are these things that come and go, then all you need to do to deal with them is to just manage the unwholesome state while it’s there, but if you start understanding that the hindrances are on the level of “my situation already as it is, even if I do not discern any specific hindrance, I am already within the hindrances”, then that will force you to broaden your context more and more until you reach that supreme safety from hindrances which is the first jhana. Not because the hindrances don't arise, the Buddha doesn't mean that joys and griefs don't arise in the world. No, he meant that you surmount those things which are there, the domain of joy, grief, and five hindrances are there but you have surmounted them. Just because you don't have any issues currently arising doesn't mean that you are entering the jhana, No, that's still well in the domain of the hindrances.

Liability To Being Hindered

One way to surmount the domain of the hindrances would be to reflect: “Is there arisen lust in me or can non-arisen lust arise?”. You have to include that liability to lust as a hindrance already because you might not have any arisen lust now but since you are liable to lust arising, that means the hindrance is present. It's foolish to think that just because it's not presently active,

that you are free from lust. If you are liable then you are not free. The liability is part of the hindrance.

Even if you are not sure whether you are liable to lust, that means that the hindrance of doubt or lack of clarity is there. If you have abandoned lust, you will be clear about it. If you are liable to one hindrance you are liable to them all. There are five hindrances, not three and a half or two, it's always the five different ways that you can be hindered.

If you start thinking of them, not as individual things that occasionally arise but start seeing that your world is within them, even your sense restraint and “dhamma practice” is within the five hindrances. The only time you won't be within them is in the first jhana, that is why the one who surmounts them abides in the joy of seclusion from unwholesome states.

At Venāgapura, AN 3.63:

> **“...But, Master Gotama, what is the celestial high and luxurious bed that at present you gain at will, without trouble or difficulty?”**
>
> **"Here, brahmin, when I am dwelling in dependence on a village or town, in the morning I dress, take my bowl and robe, and enter that village or town for alms. After the meal, when I have returned from the alms round, I enter a grove. I collect some grass or leaves that I find there into a pile and then sit down. Having folded my legs crosswise and straightened my body, I bring mindfulness to the fore. Then, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from**

unwholesome states, I enter and dwell in the first jhāna,…

“Then, brahmin, when I am in such a state, if I walk back and forth, on that occasion my walking back and forth is celestial. If I am standing, on that occasion my standing is celestial. If I am sitting, on that occasion my sitting is celestial. If I lie down, on that occasion this is my celestial high and luxurious bed. This is that celestial high and luxurious bed that at present I can gain at will, without trouble or difficulty.”

The Five Hindrances Are One In Unwholesomeness.

The first step to getting secluded is to see the hindrances for what they are, not just managing occasional flurries of worry, irritation, lustful thoughts, and so on. No, you need to see that all of that is happening within the context of the five hindrances. Liability to them means that they are there, otherwise, you wouldn't be liable to them. If you start thinking like that and depending on how much effort you make you will get to see that you are not responsible for the hindrances arising but you are responsible for them hindering you. You are the one that takes them up ignorantly, but that is not on the level of a choice, as in you cannot just choose not to take up the hindrances, it’s more like, sometimes you choose to do something that results in you being unable to not take them. So if you stop thinking of them individually but see them as one then it doesn't matter what hindrance is there, your attitude towards any hindrance is what you start to concern yourself

with, instead of trying to manage hindrance through asubha or metta and so on.

It doesn't matter which hindrance it is, an unwholesome state is present, so what is your attitude towards that? In that way, you can practice freedom from the hindrances by practicing the discernment of your liability to the unwholesome.

That's what all hindrances have in common, they are all unwholesome. So why are you liable to unwholesome states? The answer is quite simple, it's because some of those states you don't see as unwholesome and you willingly delight, entertain, welcome, and act out of them. That's the gateway we speak about, that you willingly turn a blind eye to. To the extent, you can ignore the gateway to that extent the hindrances will find a way to get in.

The Chief Hindrance And The Foremost Danger.

What is the chief hindrance on account of which people let the other four hindrances in? It’s sensuality, and not seeing the danger in sensuality is not seeing the danger based on the five hindrances, and because of that, when a hindrance comes that you don't want, you will not be able to not be involved because your core practice up to that point was to be involved with the hindrances by choice, through welcoming sensuality in your thoughts (opening the gate), delighting in it and above all not seeing the danger. That's also where the crux of that recognition of danger is, in other words, the danger in sensuality is not that later on things will not work out or things will be too much to manage and thus sensuality is not good. No, even before you engage in sensuality, the danger is in not

seeing the danger in your welcoming of sensuality which brings with it the liability to the other four hindrances. Through willingly entertaining sensuality you are willingly accepting anxiety, worry, fear, dullness, depression, confusion, and everything else that comes with it. If the danger of that can become apparent, you will see that even the prospect of sensuality is dangerous.(In other words, there are drawbacks of sensuality but that which makes you liable to the drawbacks is your desire and lust, which is the main danger.)

Magandiya Sutta, MN 75:

> **"Magandiya, suppose that there was a leper covered with sores and infections, devoured by worms, picking the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a pit of glowing embers. His friends, companions, & relatives would take him to a doctor. The doctor would concoct medicine for him, and thanks to the medicine he would be cured of his leprosy: well & happy, free, master of himself, going wherever he liked. Then suppose two strong men, having grabbed him with their arms, were to drag him to a pit of glowing embers. What do you think? Wouldn't he twist his body this way & that?"**
>
> **"Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? The fire is painful to the touch, very hot & scorching."**
>
> **"Now what do you think, Magandiya? Is the fire painful to the touch, very hot & scorching, only now, or was it also that way before?"**

> **"Both now & before is it painful to the touch, very hot & scorching, master Gotama. It's just that when the man was a leper covered with sores and infections, devoured by worms, picking the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, his faculties were impaired, which was why, even though the fire was actually painful to the touch, he had the skewed perception of 'pleasant.'"**
>
> **"In the same way, Magandiya, sensual pleasures in the past were painful to the touch, very hot & scorching; sensual pleasures in the future will be painful to the touch, very hot & scorching; sensual pleasures at present are painful to the touch, very hot & scorching; but when beings are not free from passion for sensual pleasures — devoured by sensual craving, burning with sensual fever — their faculties are impaired, which is why, even though sensual pleasures are actually painful to the touch, they have the skewed perception of 'pleasant...'"**

By seeing the connection between welcoming sensuality and the implicit weight of the danger(drawbacks) that is hidden in that welcoming, you will then realize that no amount of sensuality is worth accepting for that risk, and therefore the danger becomes apparent.

Theragatha, 5.1 Rājadatta:

> **“I, a monk, went to a charnel ground, And saw a woman left there,**
> **Discarded in a cemetery, Full of worms that devoured her.**

> **Some men were disgusted, Seeing her dead and rotten;**
> **But sexual desire arose in me, I was as if blind to her oozing body.**
> **Quicker than the boiling of rice, I left that place,**
> **Mindful and aware, I sat down to one side.**
> **Then the realization, Came upon me—**
> ***The danger became apparent*, And I was firmly repulsed.**
> **Then my mind was liberated— See the excellence of the Dhamma!**
> **I've attained the three knowledges, And fulfilled the Buddha's instructions."**

People do not see the connection between the perils that they are exposed to and the entrance for those perils being their acceptance of sensuality, because if they do see the connection, then that great danger will become apparent. The only reason a person keeps engaging in sensuality is that they do not see the danger of it.

It's Entirely Up To You.

Mahā Assapura Sutta , MN 39:

> **"...when these five hindrances are unabandoned in himself, a bhikkhu sees them respectively as a debt, a disease, a prison, slavery, and a road across a desert. But when these five hindrances have been abandoned in himself, he sees that as freedom from debt, health, release from prison, freedom from slavery, and a land of safety."Having abandoned**

> **these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, he enters upon and abides in the first jhāna,.."**

That sense of safety and relief does not come from ‘nobody knocking on your door and threatening you’(the absence of a hindrance), it comes from not welcoming sensuality through which no liability of other hindrances can apply to you, and the reason why this is so great and wholesome is because it's entirely up to you. Welcoming sensuality or not doesn't depend on the circumstances, you can always say no to welcoming sensuality on the level of your thoughts (the gateway). What is your attitude when the thought of sensuality arises? Do you see it as agreeable, friendly, dear to you, not dangerous and entertaining or do you see it as “this is the entrance” for eons of suffering (the welcoming of sensuality)?

Practically speaking, the other four hindrances will torment you sooner or later, all because you don't see the danger in sensuality, you don't see the bait as the bait, you don't see the hook inside.

For the uprooting of the domain of the five hindrances, you need to see the implicit danger waiting before you even engage, not while you're engaging or afterward when you feel bad.

Sammasa Sutta, SN 12.66:

> **“...Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they are nurturing craving. In**

nurturing craving they are nurturing acquisition. In nurturing acquisition they are nurturing suffering. In nurturing suffering they are not freed from birth, aging, and death; they are not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they are not freed from suffering, I say."

"Suppose, bhikkhus, there was a bronze cup of a beverage having a fine color, aroma, and taste, but it was mixed with poison. Then a man would come along, oppressed and afflicted by the heat, tired, parched, and thirsty. They would tell him: 'Good man, this beverage in the bronze cup has a fine color, aroma, and taste, but it is mixed with poison. Drink it if you wish. If you drink it, it will gratify you with its color, aroma, and taste, but by drinking it you will meet death or deadly suffering.' Suddenly, without reflecting, he would drink the beverage—he would not reject it—and thereby he would meet death or deadly suffering."

"So too, bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past ... in the future ... at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving ... they are not freed from suffering, I say..."

When you have thoughts of sensuality you need to start seeing them as bait and then that's how you will become unable to welcome it. You cannot just choose to not welcome sensuality, that's impossible, but if you contemplate the danger in it then

you realize that your welcoming will start to fade because the only reason why you used to welcome it, is because you never saw what it implies, you never saw its full significance right there and then, not later. When the danger becomes apparent, you will understand the extent of gratification, and then you will understand the extent of escape. You will know that if you keep contemplating the danger, you will know that the gratification which is your welcoming and delight in the prospect of sensuality, will fade and that will be the full escape from this.

Don't confuse the not seeing of sensual thought with not having sensual thoughts, that's not the same thing. You will have thoughts towards sensuality and that's where you see the peril, but that doesn't mean that you have no thoughts of sensuality arising or that the significance of sensual joy has disappeared. No, that stays, that's why, you surmount it, not prevent it from arising. If you have surmounted it for a long period, it will eventually stop arising on its own, not because you stopped it.

Seeing the danger in ‘delighting in the prospect of pleasure’, that insight is not painful, it's neutral. Getting pleasure or not is on the level of pain, but seeing the danger before you engage in pleasure is not painful, it's eye-opening.

204hh- The Six Sensed Animal

SN 35.247:

> **"...Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would catch six animals —with different domains and different feeding grounds—and tie them by a strong rope. He would catch a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey, and tie each by a strong rope. Having done so, he would bind them to a strong post or pillar. Then those six animals with different domains and different feeding grounds would each pull in the direction of their feeding ground and domain. The snake would pull one way, thinking, 'Let me enter an anthill'... The monkey would pull another way, thinking, 'Let me enter a forest.'**
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> **"Now when these six animals become worn out and fatigued, they would stand close to that post or pillar, they would sit down there, they would lie down there. So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has developed and cultivated mindfulness directed to the body, the eye does not pull in the direction of agreeable forms nor are disagreeable forms repulsive; the ear does not pull in the direction of agreeable sounds nor are disagreeable sounds repulsive; the nose does not pull in the direction of agreeable odours nor are disagreeable odours repulsive; the tongue does not pull in the direction of agreeable tastes nor are disagreeable tastes repulsive; the body does not pull in the direction of**

> **agreeable tactile objects nor are disagreeable tactile objects repulsive; the mind does not pull in the direction of agreeable mental phenomena nor are disagreeable mental phenomena repulsive." "It is in such a way that there is restraint..."**

The Right Perspective Regarding The Body.

Can you have restraint of the six senses without the right context or perspective? No, because lack of perspective means that you are already pulled down with the senses, that's why the Buddha called sensuality (and the other hindrances) that which weakens wisdom, that which weakens perspective. When you get pulled down the pathway of the wild animal, you cannot sustain perspective. You either go down the hole or you sustain the perspective. I mention perspective is because usually when a person tries to do mindfulness of the body, they think it's about 'feeling the body', but actually 'mindfulness of the body' is the fundamental perspective regarding your world, the perspective on the presence of the 'body-there', as satipathana sutta says.

The 'body-there' is the basis for these six senses/animals. You can't have a sense organ without the unit of the body on which it is based on. That's why mindfulness of the body is the perspective regarding all the six animals/senses. It's not some physical method or practice of trying to 'stay in the body', it's rather on the level of knowledge of the body-there, knowing its nature, it's the 'post', from which these senses want to pull left and right.

If you contemplate the nature of that body, as something which is unownable, subject to death and so on, then no pleasures within the container of the body will be able to overwhelm that perspective if it's thoroughly developed. It's easy to say that this body is ‘not-mine’, but you need to see it on the right level. If you think that you are seeing the body on the right level of ‘not-mine’, then contemplate whether you have any passion or liability to passion(same with other defilements) in your mind. If the answer is yes then that's not the right level, because seeing the body on the right level is impenetrable to passion, aversion, and delusion. So if you, with a mind which is not above those things thinks that you are doing mindfulness of the body, you will not make the right effort to find out what the right level of mindfulness of the body is, the level which is not liable to the defilements.

When you hear about mindfulness of the body, you get an idea of it, but instead of focusing on ‘doing’ that mindfulness, focus on ‘understanding’ the idea of what mindfulness of the body is. Most people will take their initial idea for granted. They hear the teaching on mindfulness of the body and whatever comes to their mind that is what they do, convinced that they have understood mindfulness of the body right away. That would be very fortunate if that was true. Of course, you have to start having some idea but you must not take that initial notion for granted but instead keep clarifying that notion further: "Does my idea correspond to what the suttas describe? Does it make me completely dispassionate even when I am not practicing some kind of ‘moment to moment focus on the body’? Is my mindful perspective an anchor which allows me to move around dispassionately and not liable to anger or distraction? Or is it something that when I focus on the body there are no

defilements present but when I stop, the defilements slowly return? (If that is the case, that's not mindfulness, that's you just replacing one object with another)

Your idea must be upgraded, you must develop understanding, not just go with whatever you assume mindfulness of the body to be. If that mindfulness that you assumed was correct, you would have no more sensual pull. If you understand the mindfulness of the body, you will be enlightened. So don't conflate fulfillment of understanding of body-mindfulness with doing whatever you assume body-mindfulness is. So ask yourself: " What are the results of the body-mindfulness that you have been doing? What are the results even when you are not doing that mindfulness?". You might not have any passions while you are focusing on your particular practice, but what happens when you stop? Are you still liable to passion? Because if there was any understanding developed, it would remain even when you are not focussing on the body.

Identifying With The Senses.

Regarding sense restraint, the problem is not that the senses/animals want to go and feed in these different domains, the problem is that you don't know how not to identify with them. In other words, you don't know how not to take them as “mine”. When the eye wants to see something, when the ear wants to hear something and so on, your first starting point is “I want to see something, I want to hear something…” and then you hammer down restraint on yourself and that's why restraint is unpleasant because there is a discrepancy there. That's why I say that you shouldn't be trying to get rid of these

things, you should restrain yourself but you should only do this on the basis of allowing these things to endure.

Your eyes want to see something, so you restrain your eyes from seeing but you don't ignore the fact that EYES want to see something that's unwholesome. That's how you get to outline the domain of the eye, you realise: "This is what an eye does". You don't want to be strangling the eye, but you will do so because you are identified with it and that kind of self-destruction is the only way out that you can see, but it's not the middle way.

The simile is of six animals, and you are the one that should be in charge of them, not being pulled around by them. The reason you are pulled is because you cannot stop identifying with them. When they pull, you feel like you are being pulled in that direction, and that's how you start. So you begin by not giving in to the pull, but if all you do is try to get rid of the pull, you are trying to remove the senses, trying to kill the animals, which still doesn't make you in charge, it just kills the animals.

You don't need all the animals to pull you, it's enough for just one to pull you and for as long as you are alive you will have at least one sense, at least your mind, even if all the other senses fail, you can still have the mind which pulls you. So the point is that you must not be pulled by those senses through your identification with them, not to not have the senses pulling. When I say “non-identification” it should not be understood as a matter of choice, as though you simply choose to non-identify. No, by not being able to endure the pull, by not having the clear context or perspective regarding the senses, you are automatically identified, so you can't just choose to say “this is

not mine” but you can set yourself up so that you are unable to take it as “mine”, and you set yourself up by sustaining the perspective regarding the various pulling senses. By contrasting the senses against the better, the more wholesome broader perspective that corresponds to the universal characteristics of the senses, and then you will get to see that the senses are truly wild animals. You can then see that you have a choice, to either let them run wild and then you will have to pay the price for that or indirectly know that if you allow your sense to go out, it could experience something which will result in its increased excitement and agitation, which then you will have to deal with, so it's better to restrain that sense so that you can abide in non-agitation, as opposed to having to spend a lot of effort having to calm the animal down and so on.

MN 19:

> **“...Just as in the last month of the rainy season, in the autumn, when the crops thicken, a cowherd would guard his cows by constantly tapping and poking them on this side and that with a stick to check and curb them. Why is that? Because he sees that he could be flogged, imprisoned, fined, or blamed if he let them stray into the crops. So too I saw in unwholesome states danger, degradation, and defilement, and in wholesome states the blessing of renunciation, the aspect of cleansing...”**

All you need to do is prevent it from getting excited in the first place, and the more you do that, the more you maintain that perspective regardless of what sense is pulling you, the clearer the relationship with the senses becomes. In other words, less

and less identified with them you will be. The senses will remain as they are, but the point of view will be different, in the same way, that you see a dog, a bird, another person and now there is just this creature here (your body) which is always paired with you (closest to you) so to speak. This creature here (the body) is just the one that is closest to your point of view but still equally not yours. We usually regard this creature as our own, as our closest friend, but you should regard it as a stranger that doesn't necessarily mean you well. The creature is there, you are paired with the senses and you have no choice about that, but you have a choice whether they get agitated or not, or whether you will have to be dealing with that or not. That's why there is the instruction to “guard the sense doors” and not to chase down the sense objects so that you can try to get rid of them or destroy or shut down the senses. You guard the sense doors so that you will be able to see what is approaching before it arrives so that you won't have to deal with the agitations resulting from unwholesome engagements.

Sometimes you will fail at preventing the animals from getting excited on account of your carelessness, but still, it's better to not give in to them but instead restrains them forcefully, as the Buddha would say “crush mind with mind”:

MN 20:

> **“...If, while he is giving attention to stilling the thought-sankhara of those thoughts, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he should beat down, constrain,**

> **and crush mind with mind. When, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With the abandoning of them, his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Just as a strong man might seize a weaker man by the head or shoulders and beat him down, constrain him, and crush him, so too…when, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, a bhikkhu beats down, constrains, and *crushes mind with mind*…his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, *brought to singleness*, and composed…"**

The more you practice that restraint, the clearer the danger of allowing the animals to run wild becomes. If all you are used to is being dragged around by the leashes of various animals, you never see the danger because you are constantly moving. By choosing the singleness of saying "No" as opposed to the diversity of spreading in every direction, the mind will become composed.

Usually, people think that singleness of mind will come at the end of their proliferation into the diversity of sense experience, where all proliferation ceases. No, singleness is when you undo all the proliferation and find a point BEFORE things proliferate and then you choose to stay on that level and protect it, you guard the doorway, that one entrance, that's one-pointedness.

If the senses are used to running wild, they will be pulling a lot in the beginning, that's what an untrained animal does but if you can maintain the right perspective regarding this creature, you will tame its senses and abide in jhana.

205hh- Jhana Is A Lifestyle

“Jhana is an establishment of mind that results from your own efforts of purifying your lifestyle. It's not a magical experience that will purify your life for you. Jhana is one of the last positive symptoms of you healing the wounds of lust, hatred and ignorance.”

MN 107 - The Discourse to Ganaka-Moggallana:

> **"...When the Tathāgata gets a person fit to be tamed, he first trains him thus: ‘(1)Come, bhikkhu. Be virtuous. Dwell restrained in accordance with the Pāṭimokkha, consummate in your behavior & sphere of activity. Train yourself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.’**
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> **"When the monk is virtuous... seeing danger in the slightest faults, the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(2)Come, monk. Be one who is guarded in the doors of your sense faculties. On seeing a form with the eye, don’t grasp at any signs and features (significance) by which—if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Protect the faculty of the eye. Attain restraint with regard to the faculty of the eye. On hearing a sound with the ear.... On smelling an aroma with the nose.... On tasting a flavor with the tongue.... On touching a tactile sensation with the body.... On cognizing an idea with the intellect,**

don’t grasp at any signs and features by which—if you were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the intellect—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail you. Practice for its restraint. Protect the faculty of the intellect. Attain restraint with regard to the faculty of the intellect.’

"When the monk is one who is guarded in the doors of his sense faculties… the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(3)Come, monk. Be one who is moderate in eating. With a correct perspective (yonisomanasikara), take your food not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification, but simply for the survival & continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking, “I will destroy old feelings & not create new feelings. Thus I will maintain myself, be blameless, & live in comfort.”’

"When the monk is one who is moderate in eating… the Tathāgata then trains him further: ‘(4)Come, monk. Be one who is devoted to wakefulness. During the day, sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the first watch of the night [dusk to 10 p.m.], sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the second watch of the night [10 p.m. to 2 a.m.], reclining on your right side, take up the lion’s posture, one foot placed on top of the other, mindful, alert, with your mind set on getting up [either as soon as you awaken or at a

particular time]. During the last watch of the night [2 a.m. to dawn], sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states.'

"When the monk is one who is devoted to wakefulness/vigilance... the Tathāgata then trains him further: '(5)Come, monk. Be one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness. When going forward & returning, make yourself aware. When looking toward & looking away.... When bending & extending your limbs.... When carrying your outer cloak, upper robe, & bowl.... When eating, drinking, chewing, & tasting.... When urinating & defecating.... When walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, make yourself aware.'

"When the monk is one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness... The Tathāgata then trains him further: '(6)Come, monk. Seek out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw.'"He seeks out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After his meal, returning from his alms round, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body upright, and brings mindfulness to the fore.

"(7)Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of

covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic to the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty.

"(8)Having abandoned these five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: joy & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by thought & evaluation... the second jhāna...the third jhāna, the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

“This is my instruction, brahman, to those monks in training who have not attained the goal but remain intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. But for those monks who are arahants—whose defilements are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, laid to waste the fetter of

being, and who are released through right understanding—these qualities lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here & now, and to mindfulness and awareness."

Nm: When it says "be restrained by the patimokkha", we can boil that down to the eight or ten precepts and exclude the other rules which were pertaining to social circumstances at the time, so it's not just for monastics, even if you do not wear robes, if you want to practice then the rules of patimokkha apply to you, not technically but in the spirit of the eight precepts. That's why when the Buddha would speak about virtue in the context outside of the monastic sangha, he would speak about the eight precepts, which is the bare minimum for the beginning of that self-taming restraint. The five precepts keep you from behaving like an animal and you make merit which will contribute to a better birth and so on. But if you are the one who sees himself as one who practices the Dhamma, then you know that the eight precepts are not negotiable, that is the bare minimum. So you can substitute the sentence "come bhikkhu..." with " if you want to practice, ok, come here/follow me, this is the discipline that you must take on, and once you have taken it on, you need to start seeing the danger in the slightest fault."

Now that can initially be taken neurotically, but that's ok, you will get used to the neurotic aspect of it, but still remain seeing the value of the discipline and the fear of breaking it. So in a way, if you are neurotic about breaking the precepts, that fear will actually protect your discipline. You are afraid of it because you know that it will undo your striving. Things that you want to develop through your practice can only be developed on the

basis of discipline, so by reflecting on that danger you will be afraid of doing it and that's why you won't be careless about it. If you are not afraid about breaking the precepts, that's when you become careless because there is no fear of wrongdoing motivating you.

The common misconception, even with people who keep the precepts, who see the direct value of it, they don't see how it is helping them to tame themselves, they then keep the precepts out of faith, culture, tradition or whatever meditation group they are a part of, they might keep the rules on account of external circumstances motivating them to be restrained, but deep down they still hold a view that all these random things they do will somehow magically contribute to an experience of a jhana or enlightenment which will mean that they have no more work to do. In other words they don't see a direct link between what they can do through their own choices and development of the right context which will inevitably have to result in jhana and enlightenment, they just do RANDOM work which they HOPE will produce the experience of jhana or enlightenment.

The second part of the gradual training is guarding the senses. That's what peripheral awareness is, the non-grasping of signs and features of that which is seen (etc), it's not like you don't see anything. The signs and features of a sense object that you experience are always peripheral, you don't see signs and features. For example when you look at a sign which says “Stop”, you see the letters, the color and shape, but the significance of “You must not pass beyond this point, you must stop there”, that is not in the sign, yet you experience that when your eyes see the sign, those are the features of that sign, the

significance of it. The reason I’m saying this, is because often that practice of sense restraint is conflated with a view that one must beat the senses down, by not looking, not hearing and so on, but even if you do that, you still won't see the significance of that, the signs and features of what you're doing, and that's where you need to start recognising the sense restraint to be.

When you are restraining/taming the senses you know before you do any action whether that act will be rooted in greed, aversion or distraction. But now let's say things surprise you, a sensual option arises and pressures you, then you have a choice to dwell mentally on the signs and features that are suitable for the increasing of passion or dispassion, both things are there, you must choose to attend to either one. Either way, pressure has arisen and you cannot undo that, you have seen something. You realize that you are only relatively in control of the senses, you can try avoid certain sights but still things can happen because the organs are still there untamed and when that does happen, you need to allow things to endure without breaking the discipline, that's the order and that's why you have the discipline first.

If you were to be restraining your senses correctly, it's effortless. You don't need to be beating your eye down, cutting your ears off, etc, so that you never experience objects that might cause the pressure of lust or disagreeability to arise in you. All you need to do is to make sure that when your eyes do see, or when your ears do hear, you don't delight, accept, welcome, entertain the signs and features that are making lust increase, like the sign of beauty, the sign of non-agreeability, the sign of non-danger, the sign of friendly and non-threatening, all those significances are the signs of sensuality. If people were to

truly see the danger of sensuality, none of that would ever again be seen as safe, friendly, suitable, pleasurable for me, it would be seen like a pit of burning embers, a poisonous drink, etc. Those significances are there, it's not like you must remove the significances of pleasures, no, you must stop entertaining them and look for the other significances that are equally there that you have been ignoring out of your habits of welcoming lust.

Q: I can attend to the beautiful significance of an object which will increase lust or I can look at non-beautiful significance (asubhanimitta) which would calm things down.

Nm: But not for the sake of getting rid of the beautiful parts or for the sake of getting rid of the pressure, those things are not yours. Your eye is pressured, and your eye wants the beautiful parts. All you need to do is keep protecting the context of the non-beautiful, the threatening and dangerous and keep it there, and it will prevail because it is the fundamental context. That's why the Buddha would say, in beauty, if you develop your mind, you will be able to see the ugly through it. Not change the beautiful and the ugly, it's still the same beautiful significances, but through them you see the ugly, you see the danger.

> **"...And how, Ānanda, is one a noble one developing the faculties? Here, Ānanda, in a bhikkhu having seen a form with the eye, there arises what is pleasant, there arises what is unpleasant, there arises what is pleasant and unpleasant. If he should wish: 'May I remain perceiving the unrepulsive in what is repulsive', he remains there perceiving the unrepulsive. If he should wish: 'May I remain perceiving the repulsive in what is unrepulsive', he**

> **remains there perceiving the repulsive. If he should wish: 'May I remain perceiving the unrepulsive in what is repulsive and what is unrepulsive', he remains there perceiving the unrepulsive. If he should wish: 'May I remain perceiving the repulsive in what is repulsive and what is unrepulsive', he remains there perceiving the repulsive. If he should wish: 'May I, getting rid of both what is repulsive and what is unrepulsive, remain equanimous, mindful and aware', he remains there equanimous, mindful and aware…"**
>
> – MN 152

Q: Do not grasp the sign of beauty…

Nm: Don't take it up, dont welcome it or entertain it. It's there but you don't take it up, and you won't take it up, if you start attending to the significances that you do not want to take up, the significances of danger.

Q: So in a way, you should grasp the sign of danger?

Nm: Yes, you don't start in a neutral sense, you don't start your practice whereby you have this equal choice of beautiful and ugly, you begin by being fully gripped and pressured by the beautiful. Your sense restraint begins by not doing that, so don't grasp those features and then the other features will become more apparent and then by all means grasp the feature of ugly, stick to it and it will develop dispassion all the way to final liberation. Those beneficial features are not visible because of the automatic grasp of lust - when you are touched by pleasure, the automatic grasp at getting rid of the discomfort - when you

are touched by pain and the automatic grasp of distraction - when you are touched by neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. You guard your senses by maintaining the context that will make you abstain from habitually grasping onto the beautiful aspects of what is given, and that pertains to any given sense.

You only need to abandon things which are underlied by lust, aversion and delusion, don't grasp at them, and the signs and features which are revealed through non-grasping, you cannot grasp them in the same way, means you cannot delight or lust after jhana, and that's exactly how you enter jhana by fully withdrawing yourself from signs and features that are grasped with lust, for increasing of lust, ill will or ignorance. By all means grasp the sign of ugly but you cannot grasp it with lust, you can only grasp it with discernment. It is worth keeping in your mind because it results in dispassion.

Q: **“When the monk is one who is guarded in the doors of his sense faculties… the Tathāgata then trains him further: ’(3)Come, monk. Be one who is moderate in eating. With a correct perspective (right context), take your food not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification, but simply for the survival & continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking,”I will destroy old feelings (of hunger) & not create new feelings (from overeating). Thus I will maintain myself, be blameless, & live in comfort."**

Nm: You need to then sustain the right motivation for eating, it's not optional. Don't think that by eating half a meal it constitutes being moderate, that's basically asceticism and it's

often misguided. You should be moderate in eating, not losing the context for eating. How is that done? By not eating for the wrong reasons and eating for the right reasons, and that motivation is something that you can choose to keep in your mind or ignore. If you can keep that motivation in mind, you don't have to worry about overeating or under-eating. Often moderation of eating gets conflated with some idea like: "I eat only 20% of my meal'', but that just means that you are still ignorant of the motivation behind your eating. Just because you reduce your enjoyment in eating to 20%, does not mean that your sensuality is not there. If there is any form of passion in regard to food that means you are not eating for the right reasons, which means you need to be contemplating and discerning those reasons more clearly, not just try not to eat less and less, which is what a lot of people try to do. Don't eat it if you don't need to, but don't not eat it just because you don't know where your motivation is rooted. The practice is about discerning your motivation and re-rooting it in wholesomeness.

You begin by eating out of sensuality, for beautification, for entertainment, you don't start eating with a clear mind, but if you eat just to remove the hunger, you will get to see what a burden and a chore eating is. If you sustain that correct context then all the previous wrong reasons will disappear.

> **"...Just as, Ānanda, a strong man would let two or three drops of water fall onto an iron pan heated all day: slow, Ānanda, would be the falling the drops of water, but then they would quickly vanish and disappear; just so, Ānanda, whatever it is, thus quickly, thus rapidly, thus easily, the arisen pleasant [thing], the arisen unpleasant [thing], the arisen**

> **pleasant and unpleasant [thing] ceases, and upekkhā is established: this is called, Ānanda, the unsurpassed development of the faculties in a noble one's vinaya, as regards to mental phenomena cognizable by the mind. Such, Ānanda, is the unsurpassed development of the faculties in a noble one's vinaya....:**
>
> – MN 152

You don't have to try and micro-manage your meals because trying to control those external circumstances won't uproot your greed because it is not in the food. All you need to do is sustain the correct context, heat up the iron pan, and your previous wrong reasons for eating will diminish.

Q: **"When the monk is one who is moderate in eating... the Tathāgata then trains him further: '(4)Come, monk. Be one who is devoted to wakefulness. During the day, sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the first watch of the night [dusk to 10 p.m.], sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states. During the second watch of the night [10 p.m. to 2 a.m.], reclining on your right side, take up the lion's posture, one foot placed on top of the other, mindful, alert, with your mind set on getting up [either as soon as you awaken or at a particular time]. During the last watch of the night [2 a.m. to dawn], sitting & walking back & forth, cleanse your mind of any obstructive states.'**

Nm: How many contemporary teachings teach how to purify your mind from obstructive states? Most of the instructions just tell you to focus on an object, but how is that purifying your mind? A person does these techniques hoping that no obstructive states will arise, but they are not purifying it. You cannot just start cleansing your mind because you do not start out even seeing your mind, let alone states which are obstructive for the mind. You need to first be well restrained with the discipline, celibate, seeing the danger in the slightest fault, not entertaining the signs and features that would be increasing hindrances, then be moderate in eating, having that clarity of motivation behind eating, because for most people that is completely invisible. Most people don't keep precepts or practice celibacy, most people live with a mind wet with sensuality and don't guard their senses, they don't even see the signs and features of the mind. When they hear about guarding the sense faculties, they think that they must not see or hear anything. They don't try to discipline their senses, they try to kill them. But if you do all the things that we just discussed, then you will have clarity of mind, which is protected through guarding the senses, you will discern the gateway where non-arisen unwholesome states can enter.

Being watchful of your actions throughout the day means that your mind is staying with that which is the priority, which is 'the guarding of the gateway' of your mind, so that there are no obstructions for it. That's the sole task you have which can be outlined through discipline, guarding the senses and being moderate in eating. You will end up just having to guard the entrance of the gateway, you don't have to be running around. The gateway is that one entrance into the city which is walled

all round. That wall is your discipline and sense restraint. That's why sila and celibacy is not optional if you want to practice.

Q: **“When the monk is one who is devoted to wakefulness… the Tathāgata then trains him further: ’(5)Come, monk. Be one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness. When going forward & returning, make yourself aware. When looking toward & looking away.… When bending & extending your limbs.… When carrying your outer cloak, upper robe, & bowl.… When eating, drinking, chewing, & tasting.… When urinating & defecating.… When walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, make yourself aware.”**

Nm: To compose that previous wakefulness/vigilance even further, one needs to bring that context of wakefulness that you have developed, ‘the guard post’, and intensify it. You don't need to be doing that in some formal hour of focusing meditation, but rather it's done whether you are going to the toilet, extending your arm, laying down, cleaning ,etc. So that even while you are doing all these tasks, the guard post is clear and you are not abandoning that one job that you have, which is to protect the mind from obstructive states.

Also, just notice at what stage in the training that the Buddha presents this. I say this because many people try to start here, thinking that by focusing on their hands or feet, they are doing mindfulness and awareness. There is no ‘focusing’ in ‘mindfulness and awareness’, it's about developing the right context to an unshakeable extent. It's about being able to see the signs and features of your mind, its inclinations and protect

it from obstructive states before they even arise. The seeing of signs and features needs to be discerned in the background, it's not something that you can stare at, because signs and features are in the background of that which you are attending to. You cannot see the mind as an object of your senses but you can discern it peripherally and know it. That's the principle of cittanimtta.

Q: **“When the monk is one who is possessed of mindfulness & awareness… the Tathāgata then trains him further: ’(6)Come, monk. Seek out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw …”. “(7)Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic to the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty.”(8)Having abandoned these five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—then, quite**

secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: joy & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by thought & evaluation..."

Nm: If you want to abandon the hindrances which is a prerequisite for entering jhana, then you need to be dwelling with your mindfulness thorouhghly established, which means you need to be watchful all the time, which means you need to be moderate in eating, guarding the senses, celibate and keeping the precepts. In other words if you want to enter jhana, start being celibate. You can realize that jhana is an establishment of mind that results from your own efforts of purifying your lifestyle. It's not a magical experience that will purify your life for you. Jhana is one of the last positive symptoms of you healing the wounds of lust, hatred and ignorance. Dwell secluded, removing grief and concern regarding the world, abandon the hindrances, quite secluded from unwholesome states, the pleasure of seclusion is born, you feel safe and that's the entering and abiding in jhana. It's not the other way round.

Jhana is a divine abiding, as the Buddha stated" when the Tathagatas mind is in jhana, whatever he does is divine...". You can live in jhana because the mind is purified, the senses tamed, the body guarded, the guard post has not been abandoned, you have not been giving in to that which makes hindrances overwhelm you, so you are freed from them. The important thing is that jhana is the"8th step" in the gradual training, which is where many contemporary teachings like to begin the training, by bypassing all the prerequisites. Which is quite convenient for ignorance.

If you withdraw yourself from the unwholesome, you don't have to worry about jhana, that is jhana. You don't have to worry about a technique, which incidentally you will not find in the suttas. The closest thing to a method is what we have just been describing, the gradual training - *Sekha Paṭipadā*.

206hh- The Pleasure of Non-Activity

Theragatha 19.1 -Talaputta:

> **"Oh, when will I stay in a mountain cave,**
> **alone, with no companion,**
> **discerning all states of existence as impermanent?**
> **This hope of mine, when will it be?....**
>
> **....For many years you begged me,**
> **“Enough of living in a house for you!”**
> **Why do you not urge me on, mind,**
> **now that I’ve gone forth as an ascetic?**
>
> **...Mind, when you urge me to the impermanent and unstable,**
> **you’re acting like someone who plants trees,**
> **then, when they’re about to fruit,**
> **wishes to cut down the very same trees.**
> **Incorporeal mind, far-traveller, lone-wanderer:**
> **I won’t do your bidding any more.**
> **Sensual pleasures are suffering, painful, and very dangerous;**
> **I’ll wander with my mind focused only on Nibbana...**
>
> **...The men and women who live under your will and command,**
> **whatever pleasure they experience,**
> **they are ignorant and fall under Māra’s control;**
> **loving life, they’re your disciples, mind."**

Nm: That's everyone's relationship with their mind, the only difference is how much perspective you have towards it or how much you identify with it. The mind presents you with these ideas which you accept and act out of and then you assume the ownership of them, but you didn't have a say in their creation, in their arising, the mind came up with it, so you can realise that it's not about “me” coming up with it or “me” owning or disowning that which is not in my control. What is up to me, is whether I choose to accept what the mind offers up. In the same sense whether you choose to go where the eyes want to see. The eyes want to go in a direction which you do not have to accept, but if people have no self awareness and perspective developed through sense restraint, then for them that pull is “theirs", and ironically, they are being pulled against their will but they believe that that's what they want to do. For Talaputta, in that sutta, he already had some wisdom because he was already able to see the mind as”this thing“, as he said”Oh you urged me to do this, I did this, and now you want to go back“. Now if he didn't have wisdom, he would have just thought”I want to go back“, but he questioned the thought:”Is this what I want? No, this is what my mind wants and that's clear enough but is this what I want?...no, I do not want to eat what has been “vomited up”, so to speak. I was miserable over there and that's why I left, so I don't want to do it, but the mind still wants it." So there's a conflict, you have a choice, either give into the mind in order to not endure the conflict or tame the mind in order to resolve the conflict, there will be no more conflict when you(wisdom) are in charge.

Q: In the beginning the mind offered him something quite appealing...

Nm: Yes, due to his own contemplation and choices. He also met the Buddha and at that time his mind thought that this training was worth doing. Even his own mind was not happy in that environment, which is why it presented him with these romantic ideas about living in the forests, but when the reality of those romantic ideas sets in, the hardships, enduring the insects, etc, then the mind changed its mind: “Ohhh, I want to go back now”, but he questioned it: "My mind has changed but shall I follow it...No". It's like when you start seeing yourself as this creature, this six sensed animal. Those senses will want to pull you in the direction they want to go but it's you who needs to stop gratuitously identifying with them and giving into their pressure and then they will obey eventually, and how long that will take depends on how much effort you put in.

The mind directs the other animals and it's the hardest to tame but it's still the same principle. You can recognise that when you have a thought, you can reflect further on it. For example, when the mind is interested in sensuality, it will not think about the ugly aspects which are simultaneously present there but you can make it do so, and that's what Talaputta decided to do: “No I will tie you down mind and I will stay here where you first told me to go, because it was a good idea, thank you, but now we are not changing this, we will stay here until you listen to me, not the other way around.” So it's not about not having those thoughts and trying to prevent them from arising, thinking: "Oh I shouldn't be thinking this". No, it's not up to you what you think, it's up to your mind, but you should not be acting out of it, acting upon it and accepting it without further consideration, that's on you. You know exactly where the line is, you know where your responsibility lies, the mind can come up with

whatever it wants, all you need to do is to not entertain or encourage it, if what it offers is unwholesome.

It's up to you to choose to accept the offer of the mind or not, to go with it or not, and it's also up to you to choose whether you allow it to keep dwelling and revolving around a particular subject. It needs your input and encouragement to keep revolving around sensuality or ill will. You can develop the perception of danger or the perception of abandoning, in those thoughts so that while the mind is thinking those thoughts of sensuality, you are not wanting them and abandoning them because they are dangerous. Instead of thinking: “I will have this mind, never think of that again!”. That might be the final outcome of you being completely dispassionate with what your mind presents you with, but until then the mind will be presenting you with stuff the same as any other sense will be presenting you with things it wants to do. You must just not welcome thoughts if you know and see that it's rooted in sensuality, ill will or distraction. It doesn't mean that you should think: “I don't want it, so let me make these thoughts go away!”. No, it means that you should think: “I don't want it, now let me endure this unruly mind that is trying to harass me with these thoughts.”

Q: **“...The Blessed One said,”Monks, if you are asked by wanderers of other sects, ‘Friends, there are these three qualities. Which three? Lust, aversion, and delusion. These are the three qualities. Now what is the difference, what is the distinction, what is the distinguishing factor among these three qualities?’- when thus asked, you should answer those wanderers of other sects in this way: ’Friends, Lust**

> **carries little blame and is slow to fade. Aversion carries great blame and is quick to fade. Delusion carries great blame and is slow to fade..."**
>
> – AN 3.68

Nm: Delusion is not a missing piece of information, it's an existential attitude that you have towards your senses. That's why I often refer to it as distraction because it's an active thing, it's something that you are liable to and doing here and now. Just like greed and aversion, delusion is something you welcome, act upon, accept and do not understand. It's not like something you don't know, it's something that you keep doing which is mistaken. It's the attitude of distraction, it's about the movement of distraction, the movement of having something to do to maintain your being. A good indicator would be to measure it with boredom. If you are easily bored, that means you have accumulated a lot of delusions that will be difficult to see and hard to fade. If you never get bored, then you are at least an Anagami or Arahant where there is no pressure of non-activity, no pressure to do anything or to distract yourself or look away from nothing happening, nothing being felt.

Practically speaking, boredom is a good way to practice. People don't see boredom as an indicator and certainly don't see delusion as an attitude that they cultivate, despite commitment to precepts, suttas, and meditation. They always try to deal with boredom. Even when they are practising, their meditation technique becomes something they do on account of avoiding boredom. Your reading suttas or scholarly work becomes something you do on account of avoiding boredom. Yes, you need to know the suttas and collect that information in order to

know what to look for but sooner or later you need to start uprooting delusion for what it is, and for that you need to endure and not depend on some activity to keep you occupied and engaged and connected to the senses. For example, if you decide to get bored, switch your phone off, close the doors and curtains, it doesn't matter whether you sit, walk, stand or lay down, close your books, switch off the television, don't do your meditation technique, just abide in non-activity. The mind will then be presenting you with something to do, which is fine, you don't try to get rid of those thoughts, you just don't act upon them. However, if you decide to get up or go to the toilet, those are not the kind of activities that will distract you, but if you think: “Let me just check my email...”, well that's an activity of a kind that will distract you, and so you don't do that. Now if you do that for an hour, you will probably feel intense boredom, and that's why people fear solitude or confinement where there is nothing to distract their senses. That can be frightening, but in itself it's not frightening. It is frightening because you have always been depending on the momentum of action, but that's a gratuitous dependency that you have been cultivating because you didn't know any better and for as long you don't know any better you will be cultivating it.

Q: SN 9.10 Sajjhāya Sutta:

> **"On one occasion a certain bhikkhu was dwelling among the Kosalans in a certain woodland thicket. Now on that occasion that bhikkhu had been excessively engrossed in recitation, but on a later occasion he passed the time living in non-activity (indifferent, withdrawn, at ease) and keeping silent. Then the devata that inhabited that woodland**

thicket, no longer hearing that bhikkhu recite the Dhamma, approached him and addressed him in verse: "Bhikkhu, why don't you recite Dhamma-stanzas, Living in communion with other bhikkhus? Hearing the Dhamma, one gains confidence; In this very life [the reciter] gains praise."

The bhikkhu replied: "In the past I was fond of reciting Dhamma-stanzas, so long as I had not achieved dispassion. But from the time I achieved dispassion, I dwell in what the good men call: "The laying down by final knowledge of whatever is seen, heard, or sensed."

Nm: Are you delighting in projects and work? If yes, that means you are delighting in distraction. Just try abide in true non-activity for an hour or two, no meditation techniques or trying to be mindful, just sit there, don't fall asleep, get up or walk back and forth if you are sleepy, and just allow your mind to come up with ideas and things to do, planning and then don't commit to them, just let those thoughts endure and just sit about. Do that for a few hours and you will see that there is going to be a space created between you and your senses, because that identification that people naturally jump into, i.e, “When eye wants to see = I want to see”, that identification, that proximity with the senses needs maintenance. However, if you don't act upon impulse and create that space, then you will get to see this sense creature for what it is, the mind THERE with thoughts wanting to do this and that, the monkey mind, you get to see it because you stop getting driven by it. Now say that that is your practice for most of the day, abiding in non-activity, wakeful, watching your mind, and then when you commit to do

something with body, speech or mind, you do so only on the level of that recognition that it will not cause further distraction. You do them through the mind of non-activity, non-distraction. That's why in jhana you can walk, eat, go to the toilet, etc, it's not like you're frozen motionless. Non-activity means no activity that is rooted in distraction. It will also then become clear what you are not distracting yourself from, which is - yourself, the six sensed creature, the pressure.

That's why people fear boredom, it will always turn into existential anxiety, because you start seeing how divorced from your own sense you are, from the things that you identify with, things that define who or what you are. It's just like if someone releases a balloon which floats away higher and higher, that's your mind, there is no end to how high it can go, and there is no problem in how high it goes, the problem is from your expectation, need and dependence on being tethered to the senses, because you haven't been restraining yourself enough, you haven't been seeing the danger in the slightest fault, so you have been depending on action through your senses.

Everybody depends on having something to do, but some depend on it more than others, like when a person constantly needs to be active and when they are not active they get bored, restless and then anxiety sets in, and then no matter how insignificant something is, it becomes the most important thing that must be done. That anxiety and desperation is only there because they refuse to give up the gratuitous assumption that the senses belong to them and are worth holding onto. If you give that up then non-activity is the most sublime thing, but as I said, the pleasure of jhana, the pleasure of the neutral feeling needs to be understood and developed, it's not automatic. That's

also why, let's say, if you have been confined in a room for a long time and then you are released, it doesn't matter how unpleasant a chore you would have to go and do, you will enjoy it because at least you feel that there is something for you to do, if you are still dependent on action. Now you can realise that having the pleasure of something to do is determined from how far your mind has withdrawn, but then you see people who never experience boredom because they always have something to do and to distract themselves with, they are people who really go into sensuality. There is nothing sensual about cleaning a toilet, you just enjoy the action in itself because the boredom was a bit too much to handle, but say you never experienced boredom or seperation or withdrawal from the senses, no perspective in regard to them, all you do is engage in the senses, that's when you now need even more engagement for any sense of pleasure and that's why the more you engage in sensuality the less pleasure you feel and the more you need to engage. But say you have been withdrawn from sensuality for a long time then even just a little bit of mundane engagement with the senses will be agreeable, but that doesn't constitute sensuality. Engaging with a sense in itself does not constitute sensuality.

The Buddha describes the difference between pleasure that is underlied by more craving and pleasure that isn't. Pleasure of cleaning the toilet is not underlined by craving it's actually determined by the fact that you haven't been engaging in sensuality and you don't need to fear that pleasure but you need to be careful because you might then be trying to find random things to do because they are not sensual but they can become distracting and if they do, then your mind will start

thinking sensual thoughts, and that's the same principle taken even further.

Now say you don't fear the boredom or neutral feeling anymore, it's not felt unpleasantly because you have understood it, you basically live withdrawn from sensuality, you have developed jhana, so your mind is now even more established on the separation from the senses and their pulls. That's why then from that perspective, even enduring discomfort will feel like divine pleasure. From the point of view of boredom, cleaning the toilet will feel exhilarating, from the point of view of jhana, physical endurance like eating rough food, living at the root of a tree, wearing rough robes, using harsh medicines, will feel like the finest requisites. It's the same principle, determined by how much your mind is withdrawn that determines how pleasantly the engagement will be experienced. Not in itself, but for some people who get as much sensuality as they want, they feel numb because they have been engaging with that level for so long, their mind has not been withdrawn. It's the same principle of withdrawal, in boredom, if you work through it, if you don't act out of it and even endure that anxiety if it arises, then even chores will be felt as agreeable. Now if you develop that further into a jhana, then even if you don't do any chores, just enduring the elements will be agreeable, will be felt pleasantly from the point of view of being so withdrawn, and that's why the Buddha encouraged the venerable Anuruddha to develop jhana:

> **"...Now, when you think these eight thoughts of a great person and become a person who can attain at will, without trouble or difficulty, these four jhānas —heightened mental states providing a pleasant**

abiding in the here & now—then your robe of cast-off rags will seem to you to be just like the clothes chest of a householder or householder's son, full of clothes of many colors. As you live contented, it will serve for your delight, for a comfortable abiding, for non-agitation, & for reaching Nibbana.

"When you think these eight thoughts of a great person and become a person who can attain at will, without trouble or difficulty, these four jhānas—heightened mental states providing a pleasant abiding in the here & now—then your meal of almsfood will seem to you to be just like the rice & wheat of a householder or householder's son, cleaned of black grains, and served with a variety of sauces & seasonings....

...Your dwelling at the foot of a tree will seem to you to be just like the gabled mansion of a householder or householder's son, plastered inside & out, draft-free, bolted, and with its shutters closed.... your bed on a spread of grass will seem to you like the couch of a householder or householder's son, spread with long-haired coverlets, white woolen coverlets, embroidered coverlets, antelope-hide & deer-skin rugs, covered with a canopy, and with red cushions for the head & feet....

...Your medicine of fermented cows urine will seem to you to be just like the various tonics of a householder or householder's son: ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, and molasses sugar. As you live

> **contented, it will serve for your delight, for a comfortable abiding, for non-agitation, & for reaching Nibbana..."**
>
> – AN 8.30

You don't need to fear enjoying rough robes and thinking that it is sensuality. Only a person who is not free from sensuality would use that as a reference and think everything is sensuality because that's the only reference they have. Even the Buddha himself initially thought that the pleasure of withdrawal is unwholesome:

> **“I (the Buddha) thought: ‘I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by thought & evaluation. Could that be the path to awakening?’ Then there was the thought following that memory: ‘That is the path to awakening.’ I thought: ‘So why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful qualities?’ I thought: ’I am no longer afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful qualities, but that pleasure is not easy to achieve with a body so extremely emaciated...”**
>
> – MN 36

If you are enjoying living in the jungle wearing rough robes and enduring insects, if you find that agreeable, you don't need to fear that as though it was sensuality, because it is not. That agreeability of it is determined by your state of lofty mind. If you are not distracting yourself, you will inevitably find things enjoyable, and if you develop jhanas, even the extreme pain of disease can be endured because your mind can attain jhanas at will. In other words, if your mind can reestablish itself as fully withdrawn and independent of any sense at any time, then how could it be bothered by anything that comes through any sense?

> **“Then Venerable Mahākassapa went up to the Buddha, bowed, and sat down to one side. The Buddha said to him:”You’re old now, Kassapa. Those worn-out hempen rag robes must be a burden for you. So Kassapa, you should wear clothes given by householders, accept invitations for the meal, and stay in my presence."**
>
> **“For a long time, sir, I’ve lived in the wilderness, eaten only alms-food, worn rag robes, and owned just three robes; and I’ve praised these things. I’ve been one of few wishes, content, secluded, aloof, and energetic; and I’ve praised these things.”**
>
> **“But seeing what benefit, Kassapa, have you long practiced these things?”**
>
> **“Sir, seeing two benefits I have long practiced these things. I see a happy life for myself in the present. And I have compassion for future generations, thinking: ‘Hopefully those who come after might follow my example.’ For they may think: ‘It seems**

> **that the awakened disciples of the Buddha for a long time lived in the wilderness, ate only alms-food, wore rag robes, and owned just three robes; and they praised these things. They were of few wishes, content, secluded, aloof, and energetic; and they praised these things.' They'll practice accordingly, which will be for their lasting welfare and happiness. Seeing these two benefits I have long practiced these things."**
>
> **"Good, good, Kassapa! You're acting for the welfare and happiness of the people, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans. So Kassapa, wear worn-out hempen rag robes, walk for alms, and stay in the wilderness."**
>
> – SN 16.5

The relativity of hardship and endurance is determined by how much your mind is withdrawn from these things or not and that's why it's not incidental that boredom is that thing that nobody wants to deal with, even people who practice the dhamma, they do so to avoid sinking into that boredom.

Say you have been sitting for a few hours in your room, everything is switched off, no notifications, no activity, and then you want to get up and drink tea, that's fine, but now your mind starts to overthink it, wants to get into the details, that's what you do not welcome, which does not mean that you have to never drink tea again. You will not lose sight of yourself which means even the making of the tea will not become a basis for that self-deluding whereby you become unaware of yourself

and fall into the identification of the senses you are engaging with, you still maintain that distance, that right perspective.

Q: If you are living in such a non-distracted way, your life naturally becomes simple and minimalistic.

Nm: The amount of proliferation and elaboration towards the senses and engagement with them will have to fade. That's why walking, talking and sleeping, is not sensual in itself, but can be the basis for slowing down the sotapannas progress. For one with the right view, if he were to practice sense restraint and learn to abide in non-activity even more, he can become an Arahant in this life, but some get distracted with work talk and sleep which becomes an obstruction to their own progress. That's why the Buddha admonished some of his ariyan disciples:

> **"..Now on that occasion the venerable Ānanda, along with many bhikkhus, were busy making robes at Ghāṭā the Sakyan's dwelling. Then, when it was evening, the Blessed One rose from retreat and went to Ghāṭā the Sakyan's dwelling. There he sat down on a seat made ready and asked the venerable Ānanda:**
>
> **"Ānanda, there are many resting places prepared in Kāḷakhemaka the Sakyan's dwelling. Do many bhikkhus live there?"**
>
> **"Venerable sir, many resting places have been prepared in Kāḷakhemaka the Sakyan's dwelling. Many bhikkhus are living there. This is our time for making robes, venerable sir."**

> **“Ānanda, a bhikkhu does not shine by delighting in company, by taking delight in company, by devoting himself to delight in company; by delighting in society, by taking delight in society, by rejoicing in society. Indeed, Ānanda, it is not possible that a bhikkhu who delights in company, takes delight in company, and devotes himself to delight in company, who delights in society, takes delight in society, and rejoices in society, will ever obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty, the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of enlightenment. But it can be expected that when a bhikkhu lives alone, withdrawn from society, he will obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty, the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of Nibbana…”**
>
> – MN 122

The amount of work that they were engaged with was obviously not necessary and the Buddha rebuked them even though that work was not sensual. If you lose the context and do not maintain your motivation behind your engagement with work, talk and sleep, it will then become a basis for maintaining delusion. Obviously for an Ariyan, he maintains that delusion much subtler than a puthujjana would be doing but it's still a form of that self distraction and all he would need to do is not engage or not allow himself to be engaged with work, talk and sleep for the purpose of distraction, then he will progress towards Nibbana, there is no other effort he needs to make because he has already understood the Dhamma.

Q: He makes an effort in non-activity...

Nm: Well it's the effort in protecting the mind of non-activity, as it is praised in the suttas:

> **"...then the Blessed One addressed a certain bhikkhu thus: "Come, bhikkhu, tell that bhikkhu in my name that the Teacher calls him."**
>
> **"Yes, venerable sir," that bhikkhu replied, and he went to that bhikkhu and told him: "The Teacher calls you, friend."**
>
> **"Yes, friend," that bhikkhu replied, and he approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side.**
>
> **The Blessed One then said to him: "Is it true, bhikkhu, that after returning from the alms round you enter your dwelling after the meal and pass the time living in non-activity and keeping silent, and you do not render service to the bhikkhus at the time of making robes?"**
>
> **"I am doing my own duty, venerable sir. "**
>
> **Then the Blessed One, having known with his own mind the reflection in that bhikkhu's mind, addressed the bhikkhus thus:**
>
> **"Bhikkhus, do not find fault with this bhikkhu. This bhikkhu is one who gains at will, without trouble or difficulty, the four jhanas that constitute the higher mind and provide a pleasant dwelling in this very**

> **life. And he is one who, by realising it for himself with direct knowledge, in this very life enters and dwells in that unsurpassed goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness."**
>
> – SN 21.4

That pleasant abiding here and now paired with your right view is basically jhana that leads you to nibbana. But as I said many times, jhana is not a product of your activity, jhana is a product of withdrawal from the senses and engagement from the unwholesome, it's the pleasure and security that comes from that type of non-activity. But again, non-activity is whether you are motivated by distraction or not, and not whether you are motionless or moving about. You might jump to the conclusion that non-activity means being motionless for 3 hours, refusing to move because that will be a distraction from non-activity. No, non-activity means non-distraction (*devoted to vigilance/watchfulness/non-distraction - *jagariyam-anuyoga*).

Just sit in your room and you will see in just a short time the mind will present you with something to do. If you are relishing that offer, that is the activity, that is the distraction. However, not acting on the impulse to act is already creating some space between you and the senses, that's why none of this will be possible if you do not first get accomplished in the first few steps of the gradual training (1-keeping the precepts, 2-guarding the senses, 3-moderation in eating, 4- devoted to watchfulness, ...). Non-activity is not using any type of action for the means of distracting yourself from yourself or for losing the

perspective of this creature that needs to be contained, tamed and watched.

Q: And there's nothing like the maintaining of the right perspective for the diminishing of delusion.

Nm: Sure, if you start giving in to these distracting activities, the right perspective will diminish or will be more obscured, and if you don't give in to those acts of self-distraction, the right perspective is maintained. You don't need to try to keep the perspective, all you need to do is protect it from distraction. Once you stop being engaged with the world with work and whatever else you have to do, you can then realise that there is enough space for you here to see if the actions that you are about to do are being used for the pleasure of indolence and forgetting about this creature that you do need to keep an eye on. (You don't need to be choking that creature and tying it up, but you do need to not lose sight of it.)

So now that you have finished your work and return home to rest, does that include binge watching movies, having a drink, listening to music, etc? Why do you need to do that in order to relax? All you need to do for relaxation is not do any work. You can easily relax yourself by doing nothing or something non-distracting that will not result in you wanting to do more of it and losing sight of yourself. You want to relax but not to the point where you lose sight of the creature that you need to keep an eye on. Often people conflate the two, thinking: ’I have done my work, now I can relax", which means I can lose sight and become distracted. No, you can relax, but at no point does that mean that you should lose sight of the six-sensed creature. That's the difference between activity and non-activity. If you

don't lose the sight of the creature, you will not be acting on the level of the creature even if you are doing chores, you will be doing them through the mind of non-activity, only to the minimal point of need and fulfilling the purpose and then you are back in non-activity abiding in jhana. Same with eating, you do it to the extent that you need it, and eating more than you need is no longer seen as pleasant because what is pleasurable is protecting the mind of non-distraction which makes everything else pleasurable from that higher stance. You realise that's the true pleasure, pleasure which is not underlied by craving for more. That type of pleasure is not unwholesome, it's safe and you are mindful in it, so it's a win-win.

209hh- The Simile of the Wet Sticks

Q: MN 36 Mahāsaccaka sutta:

> **“Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Vesālī in the Great Wood in the Hall with the Peaked Roof. Now on that occasion, when it was morning, the Blessed One had finished dressing and had taken his bowl and outer robe, desiring to go into Vesālī for alms.**
>
> **Then, as Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha’s son was walking and wandering for exercise, he came to the Hall with the Peaked Roof in the Great Wood. The venerable Ānanda saw him coming in the distance and said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, here comes Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha’s son, a debater and a clever speaker regarded by many as a saint. He wants to discredit the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. It would be good if the Blessed One would sit down for a while out of compassion.” The Blessed One sat down on the seat made ready. Then Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha’s son went up to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side and said to the Blessed One:**
>
> **“Master Gotama, there are some contemplatives who abide pursuing development of body, but not development of mind. They are touched by bodily painful feeling. In the past, when one was touched**

by bodily painful feeling, one's thighs would become rigid, one's heart would burst, hot blood would gush from one's mouth, and one would go mad, go out of one's mind. So then the mind was subservient to the body, the body wielded mastery over it. Why is that? Because the mind was not developed. But there are some contemplatives who abide pursuing development of mind, but not development of body. They are touched by mental painful feeling. In the past, when one was touched by mental painful feeling, one's thighs would become rigid, one's heart would burst, hot blood would gush from one's mouth, and one would go mad, go out of one's mind. So then the body was subservient to the mind, the mind wielded mastery over it. Why is that? Because the body was not developed. Master Gotama, it has occurred to me: 'Surely Master Gotama's disciples abide pursuing development of mind, but not development of body.'"

"But, Aggivessana, what have you learned about development of body?"

"Well, there are, for example, Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Sankicca, Makkhali Gosāla. They go naked, rejecting conventions, licking their hands, not coming when asked, not stopping when asked; they do not accept food brought or food specially made or an invitation to a meal; they receive nothing from a pot, from a bowl, across a threshold, across a stick, across a pestle, from two eating together, from a pregnant woman, from a woman breastfeeding, from a

woman in the midst of men, from where food is advertised to be distributed, from where a dog is waiting, from where flies are buzzing; they accept no fish or meat, they drink no liquor, wine, or fermented brew. They keep to one house, to one morsel; they keep to two houses, to two morsels…they keep to seven houses, to seven morsels. They live on one saucerful a day, on two saucerfuls a day…on seven saucerfuls a day. They take food once a day, once every two days…once every seven days; thus even up to once every fortnight, they dwell pursuing the practice of taking food at stated intervals."

"But do they subsist on so little, Aggivessana?"

"No, Master Gotama, sometimes they consume excellent hard food, eat excellent soft food, taste excellent delicacies, drink excellent drinks. Thereby they regain their strength, fortify themselves, and become fat."

"What they earlier abandoned, Aggivessana, they later gather together again. That is how there is increase and decrease of this body. But what have you learned about development of mind?"

When Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha's son was asked by the Blessed One about development of mind, he was unable to answer.

Then the Blessed One told him: "What you have just spoken of as development of body, Aggivessana, is not development of body according to the Dhamma

in the Noble One's Discipline. Since you do not know what development of body is, how could you know what development of mind is? Nevertheless, Aggivessana, as to how one is undeveloped in body and undeveloped in mind, and developed in body and developed in mind, listen and attend closely to what I shall say."—"Yes, sir," Saccaka the Niganṭha's son replied. The Blessed One said this:

<u>Undeveloped in Body and Undeveloped in Mind</u>: "How, Aggivessana, is one undeveloped in body and undeveloped in mind? Here, Aggivessana, pleasant feeling arises in an untaught ordinary person. Touched by that pleasant feeling, he lusts after pleasure and continues to lust after pleasure. That pleasant feeling of his ceases. With the cessation of the pleasant feeling, painful feeling arises. Touched by that painful feeling, he sorrows, grieves, and laments, he weeps beating his breast and becomes distraught. When that pleasant feeling has arisen in him, it invades his mind and remains because body is not developed. And when that painful feeling has arisen in him, it invades his mind and remains because the mind is not developed. Anyone in whom, in this double manner, arisen pleasant feeling invades his mind and remains because body is not developed, and arisen painful feeling invades his mind and remains because mind is not developed, is thus undeveloped in body because mind is not developed, is thus undeveloped in body and undeveloped in mind.

Developed in Body and Developed in Mind:
“And how, Aggivessana, is one developed in body and developed in mind? Here, Aggivessana, pleasant feeling arises in a well-taught noble disciple. Touched by that pleasant feeling, he does not lust after pleasure or continue to lust after pleasure. That pleasant feeling of his ceases. With the cessation of the pleasant feeling, painful feeling arises. Touched by that painful feeling, he does not sorrow, grieve, and lament, he does not weep beating his breast and become distraught. When that pleasant feeling has arisen in him, it does not invade his mind and remain because body is developed. And when that painful feeling has arisen in him, it does not invade his mind and remain because mind is developed. Anyone in whom, in this double manner, arisen pleasant feeling does not invade his mind and remain because body is developed, and arisen painful feeling does not invade his mind and remain because mind is developed, is thus developed in body and developed in mind.”

“I have confidence in Master Gotama thus: ‘Master Gotama is developed in body and developed in mind.’”

“Surely, Aggivessana, your words are offensive and discourteous, but still I will answer you. Since I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness, it has not been possible for arisen

pleasant feeling to invade my mind and remain or for arisen painful feeling to invade my mind and remain."

"Has there never arisen in Master Gotama a feeling so pleasant that it could invade his mind and remain? Has there never arisen in Master Gotama a feeling so painful that it could invade his mind and remain?"

"Why not, Aggivessana? Here, Aggivessana, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I thought: 'Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy, while living in a home, to lead the holy life utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Suppose I shave off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and go forth from the home life into homelessness.'

"Later, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life...(going forth and seeking enlightenment, MN 26)...And I sat down there thinking: 'This will serve for striving.'

Simile of the wet sticks:
1- "Now these three similes occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. Suppose there were a wet sappy piece of wood lying in water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: 'I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.' What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce

heat by taking the upper fire-stick and rubbing it against the wet sappy piece of wood lying in the water?"

"No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it is a wet sappy piece of wood, and it is lying in water. Eventually the man would reap only weariness and disappointment."

"So too, Aggivessana, as to those contemplatives who still do not live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, and whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has not been fully abandoned internally, even if those good contemplatives feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good contemplatives do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment. This was the first simile that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before.

2- "Again, Aggivessana, a second simile occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. Suppose there were a wet sappy piece of wood lying on dry land far from water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: 'I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.' What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce heat by taking the

upper fire-stick and rubbing it against the wet sappy piece of wood lying on dry land far from water?"

"No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it is a wet sappy piece of wood, even though it is lying on dry land far from water. Eventually the man would reap only weariness and disappointment."

"So too, Aggivessana, as to those contemplatives who live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, but whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has not been fully abandoned internally, even if those good contemplatives feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good contemplatives do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment. This was the second simile that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before.

3- "Again, Aggivessana, a third simile occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. Suppose there were a dry sapless piece of wood lying on dry land far from water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: 'I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.' What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce heat by rubbing it against the dry sapless piece of wood lying on dry land far from water?"

“Yes, Master Gotama. Why so? Because it is a dry sapless piece of wood, and it is lying on dry land far from water.”

“So too, Aggivessana, as to those contemplatives who live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, and whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has been fully abandoned and suppressed internally, even if those good contemplatives feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are capable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good contemplatives do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are capable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment. This was the third simile that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. These are the three similes that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before.

<u>Description of extreme ascetic practices</u>:
“I thought: ‘Suppose, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrain, and crush mind with mind.’ So, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrained, and crushed mind with mind. While I did so, sweat ran from my armpits. Just as a strong man might seize a weaker man by the head or shoulders and beat him down, constrain him, and crush him, so too, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrained, and

crushed mind with mind, and sweat ran from my armpits. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was uncalm because I was exhausted by the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

“I thought: ‘Suppose I practise the breathless meditation.’ So I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth and nose. While I did so, there was a loud sound of winds coming out from my earholes. Just as there is a loud sound when a smith’s bellows are blown,…violent winds cut through my head. Just as if a strong man were to crush my head with the tip of a sharp sword,.. there were violent pains in my head. Just as if a strong man were tightening a tough leather strap around my head as a headband,… violent winds carved up my belly. Just as if a skilled butcher or his apprentice were to carve up an ox’s belly with a sharp butcher’s knife,…there was a violent burning in my body. Just as if two strong men were to seize a weaker man by both arms and roast him over a pit of hot coals, so too, while I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears, there was a violent burning in my body. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was uncalm because I was exhausted by the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

“Now when deities saw me, some said: ‘The recluse Gotama is dead.’ Other deities said: ‘The recluse Gotama is not dead, he is dying.’ And other deities said: ‘The recluse Gotama is not dead nor dying; he is an arahant, for such is the way arahants abide.’

“I thought: ‘Suppose I practise entirely cutting off food.’ Then deities came to me and said: ‘Good sir, do not practise entirely cutting off food. If you do so, we shall infuse heavenly food into the pores of your skin and you will live on that.’ I considered: ‘If I claim to be completely fasting while these deities infuse heavenly food into the pores of my skin and I live on that, then I shall be lying.’ So I dismissed those deities, saying: ‘There is no need.’

“I thought: ‘Suppose I take very little food, a handful each time, whether of bean soup or lentil soup or vetch soup or pea soup.’ So I took very little food, a handful each time, whether of bean soup or lentil soup or vetch soup or pea soup. While I did so, my body reached a state of extreme emaciation. Because of eating so little my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. Because of eating so little my backside became like a camel’s hoof. Because of eating so little the projections on my spine stood forth like corded beads. Because of eating so little my ribs jutted out as gaunt as the crazy rafters of an old roofless barn. Because of eating so little the gleam of my eyes sank far down in their sockets, looking like the gleam of water that has sunk far down in a deep well. Because

of eating so little my scalp shrivelled and withered as a green bitter gourd shrivels and withers in the wind and sun. Because of eating so little my belly skin adhered to my backbone; thus if I touched my belly skin I encountered my backbone and if I touched my backbone I encountered my belly skin. Because of eating so little, if I defecated or urinated, I fell over on my face there. Because of eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair, rotted at its roots, fell from my body as I rubbed.

"Now when people saw me, some said: 'The contemplative Gotama is black.' Other people said: 'The contemplative Gotama is not black, he is brown.' Other people said: 'The contemplative Gotama is neither black nor brown, he is golden-skinned.' So much had the clear, bright colour of my skin deteriorated through eating so little.

"I thought: 'Whatever contemplatives in the past have experienced painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, this is the utmost, there is none beyond this. And whatever contemplatives in the future will experience painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, this is the utmost, there is none beyond this. And whatever contemplatives at present experience painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, this is the utmost, there is none beyond this. But by this racking practice of austerities I have not attained any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision

worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to enlightenment?'

<u>Recollection of First Jhana</u>:
"I considered: 'I recall that when my father the Sakyan was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with joy and pleasure born of seclusion. Could that be the path to enlightenment?' Then, following that memory, came the realisation: 'That is indeed the path to enlightenment.'

"I thought: 'Why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?' I thought: 'I am not afraid of that pleasure since it has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states.'

"I considered: 'It is not easy to attain that pleasure with a body so emaciated. Suppose I ate some solid food, some boiled rice and porridge.' And I ate some solid food, some boiled rice and porridge. Now at that time five bhikkhus were waiting upon me, thinking: 'If our contemplative Gotama achieves some higher state, he will inform us.' But when I ate the boiled rice and porridge, the five bhikkhus were disgusted and left me, thinking: 'The contemplative Gotama now lives luxuriously; he has given up his striving and reverted to luxury.'

“Now when I had eaten solid food and regained my strength, then quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, with joy and pleasure born of seclusion. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

“With the stilling of thinking and pondering, I entered upon and abided in the second jhāna…With the fading away as well of joy…I entered upon and abided in the third jhāna…With the abandoning of pleasure and pain…I entered upon and abided in the fourth jhāna…But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

“When my composed mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives. I recollected my manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births…(as in MN 4)…Thus with their aspects and particulars I recollected my manifold past lives.

“This was the first true knowledge attained by me in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who abides diligent, ardent, and resolute. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

“When my composed mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings…(as in Mn4)… Thus with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and I understood how beings pass on according to their actions.

“This was the second true knowledge attained by me in the middle watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who abides diligent, ardent, and resolute. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

“When my composed mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly knew as it actually is: ‘This is suffering’;…‘This is the origin of suffering’;…‘This is the cessation of suffering’;…‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’;…‘These are the taints’;…‘This is the origin of the taints’;…‘This is the cessation of the taints’;…‘This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints.’

“When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When it was liberated there came the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ I directly knew: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.’

“This was the third true knowledge attained by me in the last watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who abides diligent, ardent, and resolute. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

<u>Teaching Dhamma</u>:
“Aggivessana, I recall teaching the Dhamma to an assembly of many hundreds, and even then each person thinks of me: ‘The contemplative Gotama is teaching the Dhamma especially for me.’ But it should not be so regarded; the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma to others only to give them knowledge. When the talk is finished, Aggivessana, then I steady my mind internally, quieten it, bring it to singleness, and compose it on that same sign of composure as before, in which I constantly abide.”

<u>Questioned about abiding in delusion</u>:
“This is a matter about which Master Gotama can be trusted, as an accomplished and fully enlightened

one should be. But does Master Gotama recall sleeping during the day?"

"I recall, Aggivessana, in the last month of the hot season, on returning from my alms round, after my meal I lay out my outer robe folded in four, and lying down on my right side, I fall asleep mindful and aware."

"Some contemplatives call that abiding in delusion, Master Gotama."

"It is not in such a way that one is deluded or undeluded, Aggivessana. As to how one is deluded or undeluded, listen and attend closely to what I shall say."—"Yes, sir," Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha's son replied. The Blessed One said this:

"Him I call deluded, Aggivessana, who has not abandoned the taints that defile, which perpetuate being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to future birth, ageing, and death; for it is with the non-abandoning of the taints that one is deluded. Him I call undeluded who has abandoned the taints that defile, which perpetuate being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to future birth, ageing, and death; for it is with the abandoning of the taints that one is undeluded. The Tathāgata, Aggivessana, has abandoned the taints that defile, which perpetuate being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to future birth, ageing, and death; he has cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, done away with them so that they are no longer subject to

future arising. Just as a palm tree whose crown is cut off is incapable of further growth, so too, the Tathāgata has abandoned the taints that defile… done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising."

When this was said, Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha's son said: "It is wonderful, Master Gotama, it is marvellous how when Master Gotama is spoken to offensively again and again, assailed by discourteous courses of speech, the colour of his skin brightens and the colour of his face clears, as is to be expected of one who is accomplished and fully enlightened. I recall, Master Gotama, engaging Pūraṇa Kassapa in debate, engaging Makkhali Gosāla…Ajita Kesakambalin… Pakudha Kaccāyana…Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta… the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta in debate, they prevaricated, led the talk aside, and showed anger, hate, and bitterness. But when Master Gotama is spoken to offensively again and again, assailed by discourteous courses of speech, the colour of his skin brightens and the colour of his face clears, as is to be expected of one who is accomplished and fully enlightened. And now, Master Gotama, I must depart. I am busy and have much to do." "Now is the time, Aggivessana, to do as you think fit."

Then Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha's son, having delighted and rejoiced in the Blessed One's words, got up from his seat and departed."

Ajahn Nyanamoli: If you're not devaluing sensuality, if you're still valuing it, holding on to it as a valuable thing, if you're not seeing the danger in it, that means you're still within the domain of sensuality, even if you're not engaging in it, even if you're just torturing yourself, not eating and just drinking water and so on, you're still doing that with sensuality.

Q: So even if you are doing ascetic practices of renouncing food or living alone and so on, that doesn't mean that you are practicing renunciation of sensuality. If you're still delighting in the prospect of future sensual experiences then you have not renounced those things at all. And all you are doing is just a "temporary fast" so that you can enjoy indulging once again. Doing a little bit of renunciation so that you can indulge later on and not feel so guilty about it.

Nm: Your abstinence is temporary, which means that the overall framework of sensuality remains, and you're not relinquishing that. You might be playing with it and restraining yourself for whatever reason, but overall, the value of sensuality remains unchanged. So that's what I meant when I said, for example when you do keep virtue and practice sense restraint and endurance, you have to do that with the attitude of, "I will do this infinitely, forever. It doesn't matter how long this lasts, I will have to endure it forever". Not like, "I'll do this for a week". And then what? "…then I'll….most likely go back to the same sensual actions of chasing sensual pleasure". Well, that's why you're not free. Not because you haven't endured enough, in fact you might have already endured more than enough for wisdom to arise. But the wisdom will not arise, because overall, you're not relinquishing the value of

sensuality. Not because you haven't endured the pressure of sensual desires sufficiently.

Q: **"...Again, Aggivessana, a second simile occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. Suppose there were a wet sappy piece of wood lying on dry land far from water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: 'I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.' What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce heat by taking the upper fire-stick and rubbing it against the wet sappy piece of wood lying on dry land far from water?"**

"No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it is a wet sappy piece of wood, even though it is lying on dry land far from water. Eventually the man would reap only weariness and disappointment."

"So too, Aggivessana, as to those contemplatives who live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, but whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has not been fully abandoned internally, even if those good contemplatives feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good contemplatives do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment. This was the second simile that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before..."

Nm: You're not in the water anymore, but the mind is still wet with the value of sensuality. So it doesn't matter what you do, or how much effort you're putting in, or how motionless and for how many hours you sit in your meditation, if you have not, on the level of your views, devalued sensuality forever, you are still within it. So there will be no wisdom arising on account of whatever endurance you put up with, because you do so while still valuing sensual pleasures.

Q: **"Again, Aggivessana, a third simile occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. Suppose there were a dry sapless piece of wood lying on dry land far from water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: 'I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.' What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce heat by rubbing it against the dry sapless piece of wood lying on dry land far from water?"**

"Yes, Master Gotama. Why so? Because it is a dry sapless piece of wood, and it is lying on dry land far from water."

"So too, Aggivessana, as to those contemplatives who live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, and whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has been fully abandoned internally, even if those good contemplatives feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are capable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good contemplatives do not feel

painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are capable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment."

Nm: They would probably be able to light the fire with very little effort, because the effort is determined by how wet the wood is. If it's damp, you have to work even harder, but if it's really dry, or if you actually invest your effort in drying the sticks, then it's going to take very little physical effort to light the fire with it. So that's why I often say, it doesn't matter whether you're a monk or a lay person, if you want to practice the Dhamma, practically speaking, most of the work comes down to drying your mind from sensuality, it doesn't come down to finding the perfect technique or reading the exact sutta that will make you enlightened. The reason why you're not enlightened even after you have read all the suttas, is not because you haven't read them enough or you haven't thought about them enough, it's because your sticks are not dry enough.

It's not accidental that this aspect is always being overlooked, which is why sensuality is so hard to get rid of, because it's easy to overlook it.

Sense restraint is already the practice of Dhamma. Virtue is already the practice of Dhamma, because you're "drying the sticks". Sometimes when someone reads in a sutta of a person who seemingly just heard one sentence from the Buddha and became enlightened, they assume, "Oh, he was so lucky or it was the Buddha's special powers that made him enlightened". No, the Buddha said himself, "I cannot make anyone enlightened. I just point the way, and then they either choose to follow it or not".

“…When he had spoken, Moggallāna the Accountant said to the Buddha, “When his disciples are instructed and advised like this by Master Gotama, do all of them achieve the ultimate goal, Nibbana, or do some of them fail?”

“Some succeed, while others fail.”

“What is the cause, Master Gotama, what is the reason why, though Nibbana is present, the path leading to Nibbana is present, and Master Gotama is present to encourage them, still some succeed while others fail?”

“Well then, brahmin, I’ll ask you about this in return, and you can answer as you like. What do you think, brahmin? Are you skilled in the road to Rājagaha?”

“Yes, I am.”

“What do you think, brahmin? Suppose a person was to come along who wanted to go to Rājagaha. He’d approach you and say: ‘Sir, I wish to go to Rājagaha. Please point out the road to Rājagaha.’ Then you’d say to them: ‘Here, mister, this road goes to Rājagaha. Go along it for a while, and you’ll see a certain village. Go along a while further, and you’ll see a certain town. Go along a while further and you’ll see Rājagaha with its delightful parks, woods, meadows, and lotus ponds.’ Instructed like this by you, they might still take the wrong road, heading west. But a second person might come with the same question and receive the same instructions.

> **Instructed by you, they might safely arrive at Rājagaha. What is the cause, brahmin, what is the reason why, though Rājagaha is present, the path leading to Rājagaha is present, and you are there to encourage them, one person takes the wrong path and heads west, while another arrives safely at Rājagaha?"**
>
> **"What can I do about that, Master Gotama? I am the one who shows the way."**
>
> **"In the same way, though Nibbana is present, the path leading to Nibbana is present, and I am present to encourage them, still some of my disciples, instructed and advised like this, achieve the ultimate goal, Nibbana, while some of them fail. What can I do about that, brahmin? The Realized One is the one who shows the way."**
>
> – MN 107

All the Buddha can do is point the way. So then how did that person in the sutta get enlightened after just one sentence? Well, if you read a little closer, it's because his mind was very dry on account of being withdrawn from sensuality, and obviously, devaluing sensuality thoroughly, because otherwise one sentence from the Buddha would not have been enough for enlightenment. So now, when you read thousands of the sentences from the Buddha and you're not enlightened, it's not because you read them wrongly, or because they are different sentences. It's because your sticks are wet. You can't light a fire because you're not withdrawn from sensuality.

Practically speaking, most of the work, especially for a lay person who wants to practice Dhamma without becoming a monastic, is about withdrawing from sensuality in the lay world. And that is doable. It doesn't mean it will be easy, or pleasant, but doable. The worst possible thing to think or teach others is, "Oh, you don't have to withdraw from sensuality, and you can practice for the fire, that the Buddha says is impossible to achieve for as long as you don't dry the sticks….but nevermind just keep practising without drying the sticks, soaking them in water and the sticks will magically become dry, and the fire of wisdom will arise and we will all be happy". It doesn't work like that, as the Buddha described, all the effort that you put into trying to light a fire with wet sticks will go to waste, because you have not dried the sticks, through living physically withdrawn from sensual pleasures, and internally abandoning the value you hold towards sensual pleasures.

Withdrawal from sensuality, sustaining that mind withdrawn from sensuality, it's not just doable, it's what the practice is. Becoming immovable in that way, means that you might be one of those people that only needs one sentence for right view and enlightenment, because you did the actual work of drying your sticks from sensuality.

Q: You've done 80% of the work already.

Nm: Yes. Most people would be coming to practice the Dhamma with genuine reasons, with serious determination, but at the same time, still not completely devaluing sensuality, still thinking that they don't need to devalue sensuality, thinking, "Oh, but I don't have to because I'm not a monk", and that's why

all the effort and all the determination they have will not result in liberating wisdom.

All you need to do is read a sutta like the one we are discussing here, whereby it is clearly stated that devaluing sensuality or valuing renunciation is the necessary prerequisite, then you realise if you complete that prerequisite of living withdrawn from sensuality, you will need very little effort to light the fire.

Q: **"...So too, Aggivessana, as to those contemplatives who live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, and whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has been fully abandoned internally, even if those good contemplatives feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are capable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good contemplatives do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are capable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment..."**

Nm: Exactly, it doesn't matter whether they feel pain or not, because being physically withdrawn from and abandoning the mistaken value in sensuality, is where the work is, and then even a little instruction from the sutta, let alone all the suttas that we have now in many different translations and original Pali, and so on. If your sticks are dry, you need maybe 10% of that, and you will start seeing things clearly. It's impossible not to, because you are actually doing the work on the level that matters.

Mentally abandoning sensuality is not simply about not thinking about it, it means devaluing it.

Even if you physically step outside of the puddle of sensuality, the swamp of sensuality, but still mentally value that water, you're not withdrawn from it. You might be living on top of a mountain secluded from sensual distractions, but mentally, you still value pleasure of the senses, so you don't see the peril infinitely and forever. That's why mentally you're not withdrawn from it. But if you start contemplating the infinite peril, you will be withdrawing yourself both physically and mentally. And then, things from the suttas will just start falling into place. Much more than before. And then you just do one rub of those sticks, and there is already smoke and fire starting because you have dried the sticks properly.

What I'm trying to point out, because it's obviously a subtle thing which people can easily misunderstand, it's not just, "I will never think these sensual thoughts, that might present themselves", it's whether you value, delight, entertain or indulge mentally in them. Do you see the danger? Because by seeing the danger you are automatically making yourself withdrawn from those values, from those types of thoughts. Are you withdrawn? "No". That means you're not seeing the danger. You can't decide, "I will mentally withdraw myself from it", because that mind is already in it. However, you can make your mind withdraw from it by seeing the danger in that which it values and you will never see the danger in that which you value, if you think you don't have to, if you think you're exempted from it, if you think sensuality is not a problem, if you think sensuality is not "your" problem, if you think because you're not a monk you don't need to address this. Well, if you

want to practice the Dhamma, it doesn’t matter whether you are a monk or not, the sticks still need to be dry.

210hh- How To Let Go

"Monks, whatever's not yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit. And what is not yours?

"The eye isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit. Forms are not yours... Eye-consciousness isn't yours... Eye-contact isn't yours... Whatever arises in dependence on eye-contact—experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit.

"The ear isn't yours: Let go of it...

"The nose isn't yours: Let go of it...

"The tongue isn't yours: Let go of it...

"The body's not yours: Let go of it...

"The intellect's not yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit. Ideas are not yours... Intellect-consciousness isn't yours... Intellect-contact isn't yours...

Whatever arises in dependence on intellect-contact —experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too isn't yours: Let

go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit.

"Suppose a person were to gather or burn or do as he likes with the grass, twigs, branches, & leaves here in Jeta's Grove. Would the thought occur to you, 'It's us that this person is gathering, burning, or doing with as he likes'?"

"No, lord. Why is that? Because those things are not our self nor do they pertain to our self."

"In the same way, monks, the eye isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit... The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body... The intellect's not yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit... Whatever arises in dependence on intellect-contact—experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit."

– SN 35.101

When you ask "How do I let go?", do you ask that question when you are at the peak of happiness and when life is comfortable? Do you ask how to let go of that pleasure or excitement? No. That question is always asked when there's something bothering you, when you're overwhelmed, when something that you do not want is not going away, when you can't help but keep revolving around something that's unpleasant. That's when you want to know how to let go.

However, you have to stop trying to get rid of that suffering because *letting go* entails developing wisdom in regard to the nature of not being able to hold things in the first place. If you were truly *holding* the loved one, they would not have passed, they would not have changed, you would not have been experiencing suffering, you would have been in control.

> **"Bhikkhus, form is non-self. For if, bhikkhus, form were self, this form would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to control form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'**
>
> **But because form is non-self, form leads to affliction, and it is not possible to control form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'**
>
> **"Feeling is non-self.... ... Perception is non-self.... Intentions are non-self.... Consciousness is non-self. For if, bhikkhus, consciousness were self, this consciousness would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to control consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.' But because consciousness is non-self, consciousness leads to affliction, and it is not possible to control consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus."**
>
> – SN 22.59

When things are comfortable, people don't want to look at the nature of change or contemplate letting go.

When things are happy and bright. They fully develop a belief that they are in control of what they own, what they possess, who they love, who they are. But then when things change, as you know they will but you have been ignoring that fact, NOW you want to let go. But real y now you just want to not suffer the painful consequences which are the result of you holding on.

It's also not a question of never engaging with the world because things will change. It's about never losing perspective, in regard to that which is subject to change, which is everything around you, including yourself.

In other words, letting go is not something you do. Letting go is understanding that you could not have held things in the first place.

> **"...Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu is practising in this way —'It could not be and it could not be mine; it will not be, it will not be mine. Whatever there is, whatever exists—I abandon that'. In this way he obtains equanimity. He does not delight in that equanimity, he doesn't welcome it, doesn't keep holding on to it. For him, not delighting in that equanimity, not welcoming it, not holding onto it, consciousness is not dependent on it, he doesn't assume it. Ānanda, a bhikkhu who is without assumptions, is fully extinguished."**
>
> – MN 106

Don't just reflect on letting go when there is discomfort or when there is pain, or when there is reminder of it, but do it at the

peak of your happiness. When everything is ne, everything is going your way, be aware that it could have not been that way and it won't be that way. That reflection and remembrance can result in a slight uneasiness, but that is the gateway to that right perspective of recognising the true meaning of *anicca* that the Buddha spoke about. *Anicca* means “subject to change”, it doesn't mean “changing al the time”, it means “subject to change, against your will , outside of your scope of your control, you are subject to it”.

Understanding *anicca*, understanding “being subject to change” means letting go, it means preventing yourself from assuming that you are holding on.

Often you will get given advice to just let go, but “just let go” is not a matter of choice. Even *holding* is not a matter of choice. It's the result of whether you have perspective in regard to what is subject to change or if you're ignoring that. If you're ignoring the nature that things are subject to change, that things are fundamental y not in your control, then you're “holding”, even if you don't think “I will hold this dearly”, you are already making something dear to you and you're holding it blindly. If you're not ignoring that things are subject to change, if you're consciously making an effort "Oh look, this is my dog, my pet I had it my whole life, his life can end, my life can end, that's the most natural thing. But I don't want to think about it only when it happens, and now pretend that it will never happen, and just laugh it o and change the subject. Such an attitude means I am ignoring the basic, crude, obvious reality of things being subjected to change, that is against my will , and because of that I'm holding on to things, not because I look after the dog.

Just because I feed it doesn't mean I'm attached. No. Only if I DO NOT have perspective in regard to the dog being subject to change, or myself being subject to change, then that's how I'm holding, that's how I'm attached". Likewise with family, possessions, wealth, health, things you take for granted. You take them for granted by ignoring that they are subject to change, because it's disconcerting to think about it. You think you can avoid it by ignoring it, but then you pay the price when they change and you're affected, and then you want to let go. But that's just the result of everything else you've been holding wrongly before.

"How do I let go?", should be reformulated as "How do I not lose perspective in regard to that which I hold dearly and is subject to change?

Well, by making an effort to think about these things, rightly, even if you have to set some time aside everyday, like half an hour and just contemplate how things are subject to change. When you are doing such a contemplation, if you feel anxious, al ow that feeling to manifest, because that is the feeling of the world that you're in. That anxiety is the result of recognising the true nature of things, and initial y, that's not going to be pleasant to the mind which up to that point, has been making all the effort to ignore the nature of change. If somebody is asking the question, "How to let go?" That means at least to that extent, they have some sort of recognition of their responsibility in their own suffering.

The suffering you're experiencing on account of not letting go is the result of an underlying problem of ignoring that things are subject to change. You don't admit that to yourself enough, you

never let that sink in deep enough, because it's felt unpleasantly. As simple as that. Therefore, you can start letting go by admitting these things to yourself, by contemplating it, and by enduring the unpleasantness of it when it arises. You can realise that you have a choice, you're either going to endure those mild anxieties and concerns on account of the realisation that, “Yes, things will change and I will not ignore this”. Or you're going to pretend it's not there, and then be completely crushed, when things do change against your will . That's when you will be asking, “How do I let go?”. You might even lose your mind with grief and so on. So don't wait for that to prompt you to think about letting go. Don't wait until it's too late.

You can let go or become detached by seeing that you could not have been attached to it in the first place, and the only way to see that is to contemplate that. It will prevent you from being attached the way you are.

You cannot be attached to your pets or a loved one or possessions, if you don't forget they can be taken away at any given second, and the fact that that is a possibility, means they were never yours to begin with, no matter how long you have been attached to them, no matter how deeply you have loved them. It doesn't matter what you do, this is the ultimate context, “THIS is subject to change, it's against my will”, that's *anicca*. Mindfulness of that context is worth developing because it leads to true freedom.

If you do make the effort and sustain the perspective that, “My dear pet can be taken away at any given time”. That perspective will prevent you from becoming blindly, carelessly, obliviously attached to it. And when things change, there will not be as

much of a shock to the system, because you know beforehand that it is truly out of your hands. So the grief will be seriously dampened, and if you've truly developed a full understanding of *anicca*, there will be no grief at all. Even for people who are not monks or who are not committed to this practice 24/7, it's still a useful thing to be aware of, the fact that things are subject to change. It's quite a useful superpower that you can develop in this life. It keeps you more resilient, more patient, more stable, more impermeable to disruptions, because sometimes things might change quickly into one thing and then into another, from very pleasant, to intensely unpleasant, and you will still be able to sustain some sort of composure in regard to it, which most people would not. Which means your well being, your contentment will be less affected, even as an undevoted practitioner.

It's always useful to have that authentic recognition of “things are subject to change”. But it needs to be done on that personal level. Usual y when a person hears about *anicca*, it's often taken in this abstract sense,

“Yes, everything is subject to change. Modern science has shown everything is constantly changing, etc”.

People tend to think about *anicca* in those completely impersonal terms, but that's not *anicca*. *Anicca* is finding that which is dear to you, and contemplating that to be subject to change, and then see how indifferent you're going to stay if you start thinking like that. If you work through that unease on account of contemplating the loss of that which is personal y dear to you, that's where freedom from suffering canbe found. The letting go that comes from understanding the nature of

things is how you will not suffer even when your dearest family members, pets, friends, or whatever, change, die or leave. Your mind will not be affected. That doesn't mean that you will not perceive what has happened or not know the significance of an event, it just means you will not be as affected by it because you never lost perspective in regards to that which is inevitable- sickness, old age and death.

> **“What do you think, bhikkhus: is matter permanent or impermanent?”**
>
> **“Impermanent, Bhante”.**
>
> **“And whatever is impermanent: is that suffering or pleasure?”**
>
> **“Suffering, Bhante”.**
>
> **"And whatever is impermanence, suffering, of the nature to change: is it appropriate to see that as**
>
> **‘This is mine, I am this, this is myself’?"**
>
> **“No,Bhante”.**
>
> **“Is feeling. .perception. .determinations. .consciousness permanent or impermanent?”**
>
> **“Impermanent, Bhante”.**
>
> **“And whatever is impermanent: is that suffering or pleasure?”**
>
> **“Suffering, Bhante”.**

"And whatever impermanent, suffering, of the nature to change: is it appropriate to see that as

‘This is mine, I am this, this is myself’?"

“No, Bhante”.

"Therefore, bhikkhus, whatever matter—past-future-present, here or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—the essence of all matter should be seen with the right understanding in this way: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself’.

Whatever feeling. .Whatever perception. .Whatever determinations. .Whatever consciousness—past-future-present, here or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—the essence of all matter should be seen with the right understanding in this way: ’This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self’.

Seeing in this way, bhikkhus, a noble disciple becomes disenchanted with matter, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with determinations, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Dispassionate, he is liberated. Liberated, there is the knowledge: ‘Liberated’. He understands: ’Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what should be done has been done, there is no more of this.’"

– SN 22.59

212hh- How to be Happy

The first thing you have to answer is what happiness is for you? Most people generally go through life without even knowing what they want, just following things that make them feel good, and avoiding things that don't make them feel good. That doesn't necessarily mean that they're following happiness. It just means that they are following an impulse. So the first step in finding happiness would be to recognize the difference between just going after things that might make you feel pleasant at the time, and cultivating things that will lead to a long-term sense of well-being.

I'm sure many people are aware of that difference. If you stop and think about it, "What is it that makes me happy?", you will not necessarily know but you would know that things that you've been chasing up to that point have not resulted in contentment, which is really what happiness is. It's not found in being pleased with a current experience that you're enjoying, like being with your friends or having an outdoor adventure, etc. It's found in being perpetually contented with yourself, with your well-being no matter what life throws at you.

To achieve that, a certain kind of work is required, one of self-reflection and not one of just energetically going after every sensual desire that arises. By recognizing, through self-reflection, in which direction happiness lies, you then have a better chance of finding it. By clarifying for yourself what you want, what you need, and by reflecting on your past experiences to see which one of those made you happy in a sense that you were happy with yourself, content, and at ease,

that will give you a clearer picture as to what is useful for long term contentment. Having such a clear picture is a necessary prerequisite, and then what you will come to realize is that the most common notion, the impulse-based notion of just chasing whatever the present sense-desire is, it's more often than not, not the reason for happiness, but instead results in you wanting even more, in you being unsatisfied, unhappy, not contented, and becoming more desperately driven, which is not a state of ease.

In other words, chasing sense pleasures, although that might provide you with a momentary distraction from your dis-ease, you can realize, if you do just a tiny bit of self-reflection, that those activities are not where happiness is to be found, and that they only provide a temporary satisfaction of your senses.

Most people who do not understand what happiness is would naturally think, "Getting what I want is happiness." But how about not wanting anything that you can or cannot get? If you don't desire anything, you can't grieve over not getting what you want either. So you can realize that happiness is a state of mind that you are responsible for. You might not be responsible for things that you get, things that you don't get, things that you had or lost, and so on. But you're certainly responsible for the values that you place upon those things.

Do you place value in the objects of your senses? Or do you place value on the contentment of the mind? If you place value in being perpetually content, then it requires you to develop the ability to say no to yourself, to draw a line for yourself, because otherwise, the sense desires will take you into infinite directions that can never be satisfied.

One needs to understand what happiness is. If you understand what happiness is, even if you don't make any excessive direct effort towards it, you will already be going towards it because you have a certain clarity of what it is. Through understanding it, you would already have a clearer picture as to where to draw the line for your sense desires, when to say no, and so on.

For example, say that you want something, there's already the implicit knowledge, whether that thing is necessary, or whether it will just be another attempt to try and satisfy this insatiable thirst for sensual gratification, and you know when it would probably be better if you were to say no to yourself, it's not a hard thing to see, because that knowledge is already implicit. The problem is just habitually acting out of impulse.

Knowing what happiness is, is already a step forward toward contentment. Knowing when to restrain yourself, and then taking responsibility for when you do allow yourself to engage with your senses. That will make the mind more in your control. Which brings us to the second point, knowing what happiness is, is the prerequisite, it sets the direction for you to develop a happy mind. The development of happiness is the development of a mind that has been tamed.

The tamer and more control you have over your mind, the more at ease you are with whatever circumstances life throws at you. Things will be less challenging, so to speak, which doesn't mean everything will go your way, but means that when things don't go your way, when you don't get what you want, you will not lose perspective, because you haven't been blindly or habitually acting out of impulse towards every whimsical desire that arises. Knowing what happiness is, and developing

certain self-control regarding your mind and your mental state, will not occur as a result of some magical recipe. Self-control arises on account of the effort that you put into withstanding the pressure of your sense's desires, learning how to draw a line, learning how to say no, then enduring it and growing out of it. Happiness comes from taming your mind, from freeing it of defilement.

215hh- Mindfulness Of Breathing And Calming Of The Aversion

"The Blessed One said, "Monks, do you develop mindfulness/recollection of in-&-out breathing?" When this was said, Ven. Arittha replied to the Blessed One, "I develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, lord."

"But how do you develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, Arittha?"

"Having abandoned sensual desire for past sensual pleasures, having done away with sensual desire for future sensual pleasures, and having thoroughly subdued perceptions of irritation/aversion/resistance (paṭighasaññā) with regard to internal & external events, I breathe in mindfully and breathe out mindfully."

"There is that mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, Arittha. I don't say that there isn't. But as to how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is brought in detail to its culmination, listen and pay close attention. I will speak..."

...The Blessed One said, "And how, Arittha, is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing brought in detail to its culmination? There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his

> **legs crosswise, holding his body upright, and bringing recollection to the fore. Always recollected, he breathes in; recollected he breathes out.**
>
> **"Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.'..."**
>
> – SN 54.6

Some might think that what Arittha described is not correct mindfulness of breathing but the Buddha didn't disagree with him and then offered a *different* practice. On the contrary, he acknowledged it but then added that his practice is not complete. Then he went to describe how to develop Ven Arittha's mindfulness of breathing to fulfilment. Arittha's practice was enough for freedom from sensuality, which he claimed, and the Buddha didn't dispute. However, it was not enough for final liberation and uprooting of all conceit. So if you practice that mindfulness of breathing in that simply sense that he described, which is by the way how every anapanasati instruction begins : "Recollected he breathes in, Recollected he breathes out", that's all you need to know and if you stick to that as the Ven.Arittha did you will overcome any desire towards sensual objects of the present, past and future. In other words, you would have surmounted the entire domain of sensual craving and most importantly you would have completely subdued that *patigha* towards your own senses. Which is enough for having the five lower fetters destroyed.

Mindfulness of breathing is often taken as a mechanical method, and so to avoid that mistake, it would be better to first follow Ven.Arritha's instructions because it would prevent you

from falling into a mindless ‘in-and-out-breathing-focussing-visualisation’ technique. It would force you to develop knowledge of the enduring breath underneath your experience, regardless of the mental, emotional, or physical state.(That's also how *anapanasati* brings *satipatthana* to fulfilment.) As the Suttas say, recollected he breathes in or out. They don’t say “*focused*” or “*concentrated*” he breathes in or out.

If you overcome all sensuality and subdue all of the *patigha* that you have towards your own senses and towards anything or anyone in the world, present, past or future, then you will be ready to follow the Buddha's detailed instructions on *anapanasati*. You will also know exactly what he means, otherwise, you will be doing his instructions with sensuality and as a method that you think will result in a "Greater sensual pleasure for me!". Any greatness of mindfulness of breathing can only be developed upon complete surmounting of sensuality or overcoming the five lower fetters.

That breath underneath your experience that is always enduring and which you don't lose sight of (the knowledge of the breath being there), is an anchor for mindfulness. You can focus on that physical side if you want but you must first know that the breathing is underneath you, that's really what the anchor is. Using the enduring breath that's already there happening to you, underneath your emotional state, etc, as an anchor for mindfulness and then investing effort into not losing sight of that peripherally. You don't need to stop doing what you are doing in order to breathe, but you can certainly not allow yourself to be absorbed into what you're doing, so that you forget that breathing is happening in the background. It's about learning how not to overly commit to the foreground attention

and learning how to stretch your mind to discern ‘both ends’ (background and foreground) simultaneously enduring. That's why, when you develop *samadhi*/composure, the mind becomes pliable, it can stretch, it's no longer a hard twisted lump.

Q: Having become accomplished in virtue and sense restraint, things calm down and then the reality of the body becomes clearer.

Nm: That reality of the body will first present itself as unpleasant and confining because you will experience the fundamental *patigha* that you have towards it, you are going to experience this physical resistance, sickness, like a heroin addict going through withdrawal because you're withdrawing from the entire domain of ‘sensual being’ (*kamabhava*). However, you have to abandon that *patigha*/aversion, that aversion towards your own senses which are no longer engaging with sensual distractions. That's why the sensual desire is so powerful because the aversion towards being confined within the body underneath it is extremely strong and the only means of escape, that an ordinary person knows, is sensual pleasure, which is no escape at all.

Q: In a way, that's the first thing you do as you are born, your first act is to try and escape that fundamental discomfort. Your senses are agitated and you don't want that pain and so you automatically reach away from that and into the direction of sensual objects.

Nm: That's what is meant by ‘underlying tendencies’. The baby is not doing anything but the mind is paired with the senses and they are uncomfortable, however subtle it may be. There is nothing else there except that discomfort for a newborn mind

and what an unenlightened mind does, regardless of the type of discomfort it is experiencing, is it wants to get rid of it. So naturally on that fundamental level when the baby is experiencing the discomfort of its new born body/senses, it naturally goes in the direction of sense objects. Not that it chooses to but the discomfort pushes it in that direction and then everything else it starts encountering in the world, the mother, breastfeeding, etc, just becomes a confirmation of that direction where it found relative safety from this discomfort which itself is, this unsafety of the body.

Q: By knowing the sense organs for what they are, means that you experience them as uncomfortable, pressured and agitated.

Nm: Yes, practically speaking, you will experience them as a pressure. However there is only pressure when you have ignorance, which the baby does, it has an underlying tendency of *avijja*. If there was no *avijja* in that baby's mind, it would not have been born. If you begin to know and see the sense organs clearly and sustain that clarity, you will begin to diminish your ignorance in regards to them, your appropriation of them, your assumption of ownership. You will get to understand that resisting them is futile and therefore your aversion will also fade.

Q: The body is fundamentally agitated.

Nm: The nature of form/*rupa* is to deform, the elements which it is made up of are changing and reshaping and your body is doing the same.

Q: You cannot just remove that bodily discomfort because that is the body. You have to somehow make peace with it.

Nm: By removing your aversion towards the senses, that's how you make peace. You subdue all perceptions of *patigha* by thoroughly developing sense restraint, keeping a close eye on them so that they don't get polluted by the unwholesome.

Q: If you had to suppress the body, trying to not let it sense anything, it would just get more agitated.

Nm: If you want to calm down these wild animals, these untamed sense organs, you can't just give them what they want and you certainly won't calm them down by beating and starving them either. You need to give them the right kind of food when needed and not too much.

223hh- Practice Of Generosity

Q: Is generosity beneficial?

Nyanamoli: The act of generosity is an act of giving things up. It makes you and others feel good. It makes you give things up and feel good on account of it. Giving up something of yours, part of your wealth, earnings, possessions, you end up enjoying the fact that somebody is happy on account of it. It's a less constricted state of mind. There can be many layers of giving. Some people give by expecting something back, but it doesn't matter. In itself, the phenomenon of giving, still requires giving up, and that thread remains wholesome throughout the giving, even if I give it with the desire for some future benefit, it's still good to give. Sure, the best way to give is when you are completely unattached to what you are giving. (AN 7.49)

Q: I think generosity also provides the donor a sense of security.

Nm: It does and it is an uplifting act. It's a greater state of mind than the mind of one who doesn't give. The mind that doesn't give always revolves around habits of taking, possessing, owning, protecting, worrying, trying to control things that are unownable, things which cannot be protected, and can be taken away. The only way to sustain that state is to keep doubling down, constricting the mind more and more and more, which leads to a bad destination.

Giving prevents that from happening. Giving is like a pressure release valve to that constriction, it will help your mind to open up. The act of giving requires you to let go. When you give something up you receive a greater elevation of mind, because

you force your mind to back off, step away from anything that you have been constricting yourself over.

The true purpose of generosity is to force your mind to expand. That's why generosity, friendliness, all that goes hand in hand. It's a less limiting, narrow state of mind.

Q: Why would a person be stingy?

Nm: Insecurity, fear of non-control. By "holding on" they get a false sense of security, but it doesn't last long because what they are holding on to is not secure. Their stinginess is the proliferation of the sense of self that is being threatened by even little things that it can't have. The more it proliferates, the more it will need for its maintenance, and the more sensitive it will become. That's why you have people who have many things and still it's never enough because they have become psychologically locked into that pattern of always seeing that it's never enough because deep down they know that their attachments cannot be owned to begin with. You can have great amounts of wealth and so on, but fundamentally, you will feel that it's not in your control. Deep down, you know that. Why? Because you could die at any given moment, the economy could crash, thieves could take it away and so on. All of that is implicit in your 'ownership'. If you don't own it, how can you be affected if it changes or goes away? That's exactly the whole point of the encouragement that the Buddha gave to some monks in a forest:

> **"Bhikkhus, whatever is not yours, abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness. And what is it, bhikkhus, that is not yours? Form is not yours: abandon it. When you have**

abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness. Feeling is not yours … Perception is not yours … Intentions are not yours … Consciousness is not yours: abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.

"Suppose people were to carry off the grass, sticks, branches, and foliage in this Jeta's Grove, or to burn them, or to do with them as they wish. Would you think: 'People are carrying us off, or burning us, or doing with us as they wish'?" "No, venerable sir. For what reason? Because, venerable sir, that is neither our self nor what belongs to our self."

"So too, bhikkhus, form is not yours … consciousness is not yours: abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness."

– SN 22.33

People who are stingy or miserly, lack wisdom in that regard, they don't see that they cannot fundamentally own anything, they ignore that fact. And as a result, they keep doubling down on the action of more ownership and more control.

Q: **"General Sīha went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "Is it possible, lord, to point out a fruit of giving visible in the here & now?"**

1- "It is possible, Sīha. One who is generous, a master of giving, is dear & charming to people at large. And

the fact that who is generous, a master of giving, is dear & charming to people at large: This is a fruit of giving visible in the here & now.

2 - “And further, good people, people of integrity, admire one who is generous, a master of giving. And the fact that good people, people of integrity, admire one who is generous, a master of giving: This, too, is a fruit of giving visible in the here & now.

3- “And further, the fine reputation of one who is generous, a master of giving, is spread far & wide. And the fact that the fine reputation of one who is generous, a master of giving, is spread far & wide: This, too, is a fruit of giving visible in the here & now.

4 - “And further, when one who is generous, a master of giving, approaches any assembly of people—noble warriors, brahmans, householders, or contemplative, he does so confidently and without embarrassment. And the fact that when one who is generous, a master of giving, approaches any assembly of people, noble warriors, brahmans, householders, or contemplatives, he does so confidently and without embarrassment: This, too, is a fruit of giving visible in the here & now.

5 - “And further, at the break-up of the body, after death, one who is generous, a master of giving, reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world. And the fact that at the break-up of the body, after death, one who is generous, a master of giving,

reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world: This is a fruit of giving in the next life."

When this was said, General Sīha said to the Blessed One: "As for the four fruits of giving visible in the here & now that have been pointed out by the Blessed One, it's not the case that I go by conviction in the Blessed One with regard to them. I know them, too. I am generous, a master of giving, dear & charming to people at large. I am generous, a master of giving; good people, people of integrity, admire me. I am generous, a master of giving, and my fine reputation is spread far & wide: 'Sīha is generous, a doer, a supporter of the Saṅgha.' I am generous, a master of giving, and when I approach any assembly of people—noble warriors, brahmans, householders, or contemplatives—I do so confidently & without embarrassment.

"But when the Blessed One says to me, 'At the break-up of the body, after death, one who is generous, a master of giving, reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world,' that I do not know. That is where I go by conviction in the Blessed One."

"So it is, Sīha. So it is. At the break-up of the body, after death, one who is generous, a master of giving, reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world."

One who gives is dear. People at large admire him. He gains honor. His status grows. He enters an assembly unembarrassed. He is a confident, non-stingy man.

> **Therefore the wise give gifts. Seeking happiness they would subdue the stain of miserliness. Established in the three-fold heavenly world, they enjoy themselves long in fellowship with the devas. Having made the opportunity for themselves, having done what is skillful, then when they fall from here they fare on, self-radiant, in Nandana [the garden of the devas]. There they delight, enjoy, are joyful, replete with the five sensuality strands. Having followed the words of the sage who is Such, they enjoy themselves in heaven, the disciples of the One Well-Gone."**
>
> – AN 5.34

Nm: Why would you become confident? Why would you not be as confident if you're not generous? Why would generosity make you more confident in any assembly?

Because it's a less limiting state of mind. Lack of confidence is an extremely constricted state of mind, whereby you are afraid and insecure in regard to many things most of the time. However, through generosity, you're forcing your mind to expand, and when the state of mind is more expansive, it is less constricted, less afraid, less able to twitch to the left or to the right on the basis of some random perception. An expansive mind can take more. The more limitless the mind, the more confident you will be, not conceited, but confident, and simply less moved, because the mind is broader.

Q: In that sense, the expanded mind of generosity is the cure for social anxiety.

Nm: Exactly, social anxiety because of which I don't engage with others because of which my anxiety increases because of which I don't engage with others. It's a vicious circle. Well, generosity is a nice way to engage with others, and in that way you start breaking the vicious circle of anxiously non-engaging with others. And even a little act of generosity is enough to set your mind at least to some extent, in that direction of expansion. By being generous, you force your mind to broaden.

Through generosity you get to override those thoughts of fear. You get to elevate your mind above those thoughts even if those thoughts are present. And then it doesn't matter if people laugh at you and so on. What actually matters is that you actually did the generous deed. That's why generosity is a practice. It's not like you do a generous act and suddenly have this religious experience and everyone likes you. Of course, somebody who has been very miserly, it might feel like that,i.e. any little expansion from an extremely constricted mind will feel like a religious experience.

Generosity is a practice. If you do it, if you develop it alongside wisdom,i.e. you don't just start giving everything carelessly away, when your own family's starving or go and give all your money to a casino. But rather, when you can give, if you earn more than you need, you can always dedicate part of those earnings towards giving, and you don't have to overthink it, you don't make demands, just find what it's good to give, who can be helped, and do it, and then practice doing it. In that way, you will start building up that behaviour of generosity, that will then become a quality which decorates your mind, and not just when you are giving, even generally, you will know yourself as a generous person, that knowledge, that decoration will be

there in the background. That's exactly one of the benefits. That knowledge will be in others as well. It's not like you have to have an audience when you're giving all the time. But if you are practising giving sufficiently enough, it will be known. But you wouldn't care whether it's known to others or not, but it will be known by you. That's a fact. That's why Buddha listed it as one of the inevitable benefits.

> **"...Then there is the case where you recollect your own generosity: 'It is a gain, a great gain for me, that among people overcome with the stain of possessiveness, I live at home, my awareness cleansed of the stain of possessiveness, freely generous, open handed, delighting in being magnanimous, responsive to requests, delighting in the distribution of alms.' At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting generosity, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on generosity. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, happiness arises. In one whose mind is happy, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes composed..."**
>
> – AN 11.12

It's a practice that should be developed and encouraged for individual benefit of your own mind expansion and benefit of

others. You can also encourage others to be generous by setting a good example, which will then in return, help their own minds from escaping the state of insecure constricted stinginess.

> **"...This world is on fire with aging, illness, & death. With the world thus on fire with aging, illness, & death, any restraint of body, speech, and mind practiced here will be one's shelter, cave, island, & refuge after death in the world beyond." When a house is aflame, the vessel salvaged is the one that will be of use, not the one left there to burn. So when the world is on fire with aging & death, you should salvage (your wealth) by giving: What's given is well salvaged. When you're restrained herein body, speech and mind; when you make merit while still alive: That will be for your happiness after death."**
>
> – AN 3.53

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230hh- Stilling Of All Activities

"Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side,and said to him:

“Bhante, could a bhikkhu obtain such a state of composure (samadhi) that (1) he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body; (2) he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to all external significances; and (3) he would enter and dwell in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no more I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit for one who enters and dwells in it?”

“He could, Ānanda.”

“But how, Bhante, could he obtain such a state of composure?”

"Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu thinks thus: ‘This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities (sankharas), the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna.’ In this way, Ānanda, a bhikkhu could obtain such a state of composure that he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body; he would have no I-making, mine-

> **making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to all external significances; and he would enter and dwell in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no more I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit for one who enters and dwells in it."**
>
> – AN 3.32

Stilling of *sankhāras* equates to samadhi, so practically, how would you then convey what *sankhāras* are? It's an important term, so how can you make it not so abstract? Most translations we find are not very practical, for example, when it's translated as ‘determinations’, you might ask yourself: “How do I calm determinations? Do I just refrain from determining anything? How am I even determining things, etc.” There are some even more ambiguous translations such as ‘mental formations’ or ‘energies’, etc. But if we look at what is common to body-*kāya-sankhāras*, speech-*vacī-sankhāras* or mind-citta- or mano-sankhāras, what we find is that those things are movements, intentions, directions, pressures, forms of ‘activities/activations’ in the broadest sense of the term.

So how to be free from *sankhāras*? How to still all activities? It's not just about not doing anything to be free from *sankhāras* because abstaining from doing is your doing, that is also an activity. It's about seeing the relationship between wholesome activities and not going into unwholesome activities, and then fundamentally removing a particular aspect from activities - the activity of ownership, which is the root of all problems, and that's exactly what the gradual training is all about. The first few steps- (1) keeping the precepts and (2) guarding the senses

doors, are for the reducing of unwholesome activities; (3) Moderate in eating and (4) watchfulness - the activities that you do carefully; (5) Seclusion - not distracting yourself with work, talk, or company, i.e. moderating activities that you don't have to do unless they are necessary. You are still active in seclusion, you move around, you intend, clean, plan, etc, but now the background of those activities can become more obvious, more discernible because you are not distracted by coarser activities and that's exactly how you can begin to discern and still the fundamental activity based on ignorance, that of taking things as mine, taking things as belonging to me. The Buddha called it "*ahaṅkāra and mamaṅkāra*"- I making and mine making.

> **"When, Sāriputta, a bhikkhu has no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body; when he has no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to all external significances/things; and when he enters and dwells in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no more I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit for one who enters and dwells in it, he is called a bhikkhu who has cut off craving, stripped off the fetter, and, by completely breaking through conceit, has made an end of suffering...."**
>
> – AN 3.33

'Mine-making' is not 'I chose to make this mine', it's on the level of being conscious towards things as if they are yours, including your 'self', so it is of course a subtle *sankhāra*, but if you have been practising the gradual training, it will be the most obvious

thing. You take things as ‘mine’, that's why ‘you’ are, it's not the other way round. The activities, paired with ignorance, are there and that's why you have a sense of self which you take as your own. Usually one thinks: ‘I am first’, ‘I am active’, ‘I am inactive’, “I am” equals things that are mine or not- mine. However, ‘Things are assumed to be yours first’ and that's already an activity, an assumption which assumes ‘I am’. Activities are already there and you are already taking them implicitly as ‘towards you’, ‘for you’, and that's why you have a sense of self. That sense of self, which is real as such, is dependent on that assumption of “for me” or " this is mine", thus it is not-MY-self.

The removal of that assumption of ownership in regard to the activities, that you can only discern on account of withdrawing yourself from every single unwholesome activity of body, speech and mind, i.e. the gradual training, is peaceful, is sublime, is the stilling of all activities, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, *nibbāna*. When there is no *avijja* in regard to *sankhāras*, then sankhāras cease and the activities that are left are the activities on account of this conscious body and all external significances/things.

235hh- Escape From The Body

Right order, and non-delight in masculinity/femininity

> **“Bhikkhus, I will teach you a Dhamma exposition on union and disengagement…A man, bhikkhus, attends internally to his masculine faculty, his masculine comportment, his masculine appearance, his masculine aspect, his masculine desire, his masculine voice, his masculine ornamentation. He becomes excited by these and takes delight in them. Excited by them, taking delight in them, he attends externally to [a woman’s] feminine faculty, her feminine comportment, her feminine appearance, her feminine aspect, her feminine desire, her feminine voice, her feminine ornamentation. He becomes excited by these and takes delight in them. Excited by them, taking delight in them, he desires union externally, and he also desires the pleasure and joy that arise on account of such union. Beings who are delighted with their masculinity enter upon union with women. It is in this way that a man does not transcend his masculinity. This is how union comes about.”**
>
> – AN 7.51

Ajahn Nyanamoli: The first thing you would notice there is that it is not about denying masculinity or femininity. It is about not carelessly becoming dependent upon the pleasures of the masculine body or the pleasures of the feminine body, which

then results in seeking the external counterpart. So the whole point is to become developed in regard to your own body. It's not about saying "there is no gender, this masculinity is just an illusion." Yes, in a sense, there is no gender as in no gender that is yours, that can be owned by you - but factually, the body is so. It is such - with such hormones, with such predispositions, such height and shape and so on - and that's not a problem.

The problem is that there is a basis of pleasure that can arise on account of the body and your mind is not developed in regard to that. So when the prospect of pleasure makes itself apparent, you are accepting the body and accepting the ownership. You are carelessly identifying and taking up the ownership of whatever you are paired with - in this case, the masculine aspects. As a result, you seek pleasure even further outside, which is the counterpart for it. Again as a result of that, you seek the union and become dependent on the pleasure of the union and everything else; all the burdens that come with it.

All this is because you were not developed in regard to the initial prospect of pleasure that you were paired with. The body, whether masculine or feminine is the basis of a certain type of physical pleasure, for a man it is the basis of his masculinity, for a woman it is the basis of her femininity. And why is that prospect of pleasure not enough in itself? Why by default does an undeveloped mind seek the external counterpart? Why would you spill outside and seek union with the external?

It's because of a view. Because of the assumption of where the pleasure of a sensual kind is, that the pleasure is in the external sense objects, not on the level of your body. In the same sense that people assume that *they* are accessing, seeing, perceiving,

and owning the external objects; not that it is their senses seeing, perceiving, and owning.

In other words, your senses, your body, masculinity, or femininity; is invisible to you, because you have been carelessly cultivating actions towards that pleasure *out there*, which is also factual but is actually secondary to the pressure of the body, sense objects are secondary to the existence of the *patigha* (resistance-pressure) of your senses. The only reason you don't see that is because you keep assuming. You keep holding the view that *that* [out there] is first, and this [body here] is second. So [in the eyes of the assumption] this [I] gets attracted to *that* [out there] because of that [out there.] Thus, whatever is *here* is seen as second, and as insufficient. That is why you are not developed in regard to the body because you assume the wrong order, and the wrong order prevents the development.

But if you see: "Well, it doesn't matter how far out I reach and seek, the experience is bound within the framework of these senses. The only way I can know the external world is on account of these senses knowing the external world. This means that, for me, the assumption I had of the external world is actually pretty much inconceivable"…If then, you start thinking about it clearly, you realize all that was a complete misconception. All your assuming is internal to your senses, and that is all you can have.

But you will not be able to reach the basic level of this clarity if you are *still* acting on account of the assumption of the external coming first. And your body, your desire, the pressure being second - as just a response to the impulse. For as long as you keep that picture perverted, there is no development, there is

no uprooting of sensuality, and there is no abandoning of masculinity or femininity.

> **“And at that time Venerable Vaṅgīsa became dissatisfied, as lust infected his mind. Then he addressed Ānanda in verse: “I am burning with sensual desire; My mind is on fire! Please, out of compassion, Gotama, tell me how to quench the flames.”**
>
> **“Your mind is on fire because of a perversion of perception. Keep away from the attractive feature of things, provoking lust. See all Sankhara as other, as suffering and not-self. Extinguish the great fire of lust, don’t burn up again and again. With a mind unified and serene, develop clarity in regard to the ugly aspects of the body. While recollecting the body, be disenchanted. Develop clarity in regard to the signless, give up the underlying tendency to conceit; and when you comprehend conceit, you will live at peace.”**
>
> SN 8.4

Nm: Perversion of the order, means literally, putting that which is second as first.

Q: So what is first?

Nm: What is first is the framework of your senses, there is no outside of it, you are fully enclosed within it. You start recognizing that, and you will start experiencing deep anxiety because you realize you are utterly, utterly enclosed - trapped -

within yourself. And any notion of the external world or external pleasure - it is not that it is “not real” - it’s real, but it’s also enclosed with you, it’s within. [It’s almost like a sense of being] ‘buried alive’ as we spoke before.

That’s why underlying tendencies just push you in the direction of sensuality because if you resist it you are left with deep fear, pain, and terror. Your assumption is of the external world, and suddenly you see that it doesn’t matter the extent of the universe you travel, it’s within this body as the Buddha would say:

> **Once I was a seer named Rohitassa, a student of Bhoja, a powerful sky-walker. My speed was as fast as that of a strong archer—well-trained, a practiced hand, a practiced sharp-shooter—shooting a light arrow across the shadow of a palm tree. My stride stretched as far as the east sea is from the west. To me, endowed with such speed, such a stride, there came the desire: ‘I will go traveling to the end of the world.’ I—with a one-hundred-year life, a one-hundred-year span—spent one hundred years traveling—apart from the time spent on eating, drinking, chewing & tasting, urinating & defecating, and sleeping to fight off weariness—but without reaching the end of the world I died along the way. So it is amazing, lord, and awesome, how well that has been said by the Blessed One: ‘I tell you, friend, that it is not possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the world where one does not take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear.’”**

> **(When this was said, the Blessed One responded:) "I tell you, friend, that it is not possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the world where one does not take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear. But at the same time, I tell you that there is no making an end to suffering & stress without reaching the end of the world. Yet it is just within this fathom-long body, with its perception & intellect, that I declare that there is the world, the origination of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the world."**
>
> – AN 4.45

When you actually take that in a realistic sense it is quite frightening for a mind that is not developed, for a mind that is still dependent on the pleasures of the external kind.

Q: You can't reach beyond your senses.

Nm: It's inconceivable, your thoughts can't even fathom the outside of it. The only way to do so is to misconceive it. And then through misconceiving, that misconception "exists" as such. That's why the Buddha said the form "finds footing" in existence, through misconceiving:

> **"Mendicant, this is not how the question should be asked: "Sir, where do these four primary elements cease without anything left over, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?"**

> **This is how the question should be asked: “Where do water and earth, fire and air find no footing?”**
>
> – DN 11

So it exists then as external, although it can’t - by not knowing that that is how it exists for you. That’s the fundamental perversion of the order. Sensuality is that, *bhava* is that. So seeing that your senses come first - (and you can only see that if you have not been acting out of them if you have been withdrawn from that pressuring addiction of scratching the itch by external means) - when you see that, you start seeing that there is no outside of this, and even your thoughts of “outside”- it’s not that you stop having them, you just see them correctly, as “within this.”

So the clearer that becomes, the lesser the perversion you are living on a day-to-day basis, so to speak. Up to the point where the perversion would become completely eradicated - doesn’t matter what you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think, you cannot fall back into the assumption of the wrong order, because the right order has been thoroughly understood, such that the perversion can’t take place any more. And that’s when you know you’re free from *kamabhava*, from sensual craving and sensual being. The pleasure of the external kind was not the sensuality, it was because of the perversion of the order that the sensuality was there.

That’s exactly what that sutta (AN 7.51) describes - through not being developed in regard to what comes first - for a man it’s the masculine framework of the body and the senses; for a woman, it’s the feminine framework of the body and the senses

- you start spilling outside, assuming outside, becoming even more dependent on the outside.

Q: “Not being developed” means…?

Nm: Not seeing it clearly enough; not having practiced sense restraint; not having your mind developed in regard to the pressure, not having endured it patiently long enough, having been acting out of it. Or, having been keeping the precepts as a means of external duty, not as a means of direct development of your mind by not acting out of the pressure of the current sense. All of that is “not being developed in regard to your own masculinity or femininity.” It means taking up the ownership of that, not being able to see it as impersonal, as *anicca*, as *‘other’*

Q: So he gives in, and delights in his masculine pressure.

Nm: You could just say “He takes his masculine pressure for granted.” By default, his mind is already outside, attracted to those things, even if he is avoiding them. Because of taking the pressure for granted as “mine,” as belonging to me, not having a mind developed in regard to that pressure, means the pressure will overwhelm the mind, the mind will not overwhelm the pressure. By default that will put you outside.

What needs to be sustained is not acting out of that pressure, but discerning it, and guarding the sense doors. That does not mean just “I keep the precepts because it’s my duty” but rather intentionally choosing to abstain from thinking about things that would be taking up the pressure; intentionally keeping an eye on your actions, decisions, on your choices, and responsibility behind in such a way that will make you *not* spill out towards the external world.

By sustaining this sufficiently you are becoming aware of what it is that you've been doing, that has been perpetuating your dependence on the pressure and the pleasure of the external world. Which is taking the pressure for granted, as yours. So you start allowing it to be, not trying to get rid of it so that you can endure it correctly, not act out of it correctly, and guard your sense doors in regard to it correctly. This means that you are taking up responsibility for it, and so you are not taking it for granted anymore.

Eventually, then you will be able to see it as not yours. It's not that now you need to just "see it as not mine." It is by not acting out of it, guarding your sense doors, taking responsibility for it, allowing it to endure, and not trying to get rid of it - all of these are ways of practicing [towards] "not mine." When that is sufficiently cultivated, then that whole perverted order on account of taking up the pressure as mine would have faded or would have diminished sufficiently for you to see that it has diminished.

Correct practice of Asubha vs *sīlabbataparāmāso*

Q: There is an idea that one practices in such a way: "I have lust for a woman. So now I must contemplate the disgusting nature of a woman's body." [or the opposite.]

Nm: See, the problem with that is that it is taking it in the sense of an external duty that one must do. "When lust is present, I must do *this*." No - When lust is present you must acknowledge it, and recognize the mind of lust as the mind of lust. As opposed to - "Mind of lust - [I immediately turn away from it and] do this. The mind of non-lust - I do that. Either way, I will

try to not be aware of myself because it's too unpleasant." So when the mind of lust is there, that needs to be endured.

If you are jumping into the practice of *"asubha"* immediately, you are acting out of it. You are not allowing it to be for what it is - the phenomenon of lust, mind affected by lust - you're just trying to get rid of it. Which is exactly the motion of sensuality - when lust is present you immediately jump into the sensuality to get rid of that painful itch. So now you learn that this is bad, and now you go "when lust is present what do I do?" And you jump into acting out [in another way] *still to get rid of that painful itch*.

Those are the two extremes that people end up going towards, by not understanding the middle way: either scratch the itch or try to deny the itch. People's practice of *asubha* often falls on the level of just trying to deny the itch. That is not *asubha*, it is not uprooting of the lust, it's just managing it. It is not even good management, because it will come back, and the *"asubha"* will lose effectiveness the more you do it rooted in wrong reasons.

So the mind of lust is present; then the first thing you know is "okay, I should not act out of this. But I should do *asubha* - when the mind of lust is NOT present." Otherwise, your practice of *asubha* is rooted in lust, trying to deny the lust. And why would you try to deny the lust? Because you don't want to endure it. The first step of patient endurance is what you do not even want to do. So all the subsequent steps are based on *sīlabbataparāmāso* - avoiding responsibility for the first step of patiently enduring it, not trying to get rid of it.

“Patient endurance is the ultimate austerity.
Nibbana is the ultimate, say the Buddhas.
No true renunciate is violent or hostile to an other”

– Dhp 184

Q: Again, you have the underlying tendency towards lust, whereas lust is not exactly active now but one can still see that one is liable to lust. So now I can contemplate *asubha*.

Nm: Exactly, so there is no “mind of lust” actively present, but if I ask “am I free from lust? Well…” So now you should contemplate and try to redefine the framework of attractive by seeing it as unattractive, create a broader context of unattractive - because that is there. Just you haven’t been looking at those aspects. But you can only do that right when the mind is properly established; i.e. when you are not rooted in trying to get rid of things, that lazy avoidance of endurance.

Q: Properly established means “being able to patiently endure.”

Nm: To have not acted out of it, so that you are not gripped by lust. And in that frame of mind, you can contemplate - contemplate the *asubha*, contemplate the danger, all of these things. Then when the ‘activated’ lust comes back, you wouldn’t need to be asking “oh, what do I do now?” Because if you had sufficiently contemplated the nature of that which is lustful, it will be implicit in that lust.

So that which was lustful comes now with an even richer background of “unattractive” because that is what you have been cultivating. It’s about rewriting the significance of things. Through that significance of lust, there is also seen the further

significance of danger, unattractive, not worthy, to be avoided, to be not acted upon. And the clearer that broader context becomes, the more impossible it would be for you to put that superficial aspect of lust first and ignore all the context as secondary. In other words, your mind is becoming imperturbable in regard to lust because that context is becoming established and it's not moving. It doesn't matter how forceful, how quick, or how sharp the lust might be, the context remains first. That is when the mind is settled in the right order, and it cannot tip over anymore.

Q: Some might want to contemplate the disgusting nature of *another person's* body. Is it not better to look at this body, your body?

Nm: Well, first, if you are doing it based on a mind that is not affected by lust at the time, you can do it either internally or externally; it doesn't matter. If you do it externally your body will be included in that contemplation; if you do it internally other's bodies will be included in that - as long as it is not done based on lust and trying to avoid the endurance of a mind of lust or any other unwholesome hindrance.

> **"And how does disengagement come about? A man, bhikkhus, does not attend internally to his masculine faculty … his masculine ornamentation. He does not become excited by these or take delight in them. Not excited by them, not taking delight in them, he does not attend externally to [a woman's] feminine faculty … her feminine ornamentation. He does not become excited by these or take delight in them. Not excited by them, not taking delight in**

> **them, he does not desire union externally, nor does he desire the pleasure and joy that arise on account of such union. Beings who are not delighted with their masculinity become disengaged from women. It is in this way that a man transcends his masculinity. "This is how disengagement comes about."**
>
> – AN 7.51

Nm: "not delighting" is about not taking it for granted. The pressure, the possibilities of pleasure that your masculine form offers you, you need to practice non-interest, non-zeal towards those. Do not take them for granted but actually start contemplating and regarding them as perilous. That's basically not using your body for the sake of gaining external pleasures…

Q: That you can never gain.

Nm: You can never gain them because it is already a perverted order, but if you don't understand that, then you would be established, based upon, dependent upon the form that you have; masculine or feminine. You took it for granted, took ownership of it. That's the root of all the beautification, the anxiety you have if it gets sick, the suffering of the senses failing, all of that is on the level of when you already took it for granted.

So you cannot just say "I will un-take it" - or "I will just let go of it" -it's not a matter of direct choice. But what you can do is first, stop acting out of the form being taken for granted; i.e. stop acting towards external pleasures, start practicing sense

restraint, endure your senses and their own patigha, endure the pressure, and try to see it as impersonal as possible.

Then if you become more accustomed to this, (which is what *samadhi* is, basically - being unmoved, by having sufficiently endured it)- that is, more accustomed to the interior of your senses (which is all you ever had, there is no "exterior" to your own experience, it's a contradiction in terms) then, being accustomed to this, stop resisting it, you can see it as simply "a thing there."

So it doesn't mean "I need to become feminine in order to overcome my masculinity" or vice versa, no - that's just you acting out of whatever you have, trying to deny it with the opposite. All you need to do is stop taking it for granted and stop assuming ownership of it.

<u>Opening amidst confinement and practice of *jhana*</u>

> **"This was said, friend, by the young deva Pañcālacaṇḍa:**
> **"'The sage, the withdrawn chief bull, the Buddha who has understood jhāna, the One of Broad Wisdom has found the opening amid confinement.'**
> **"What, friend, has the Blessed One spoken of as confinement and what as the achievement of an opening amid confinement?"**
> **"The Blessed One, friend, has spoken of these five objects of sensual pleasure as confinement.**
> **What five?**
> **Sights known by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. Sounds known by the ear ...Smells known by the nose ...**

> **Tastes known by the tongue …Touches known by the body that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. These are the five kinds of sensual pleasures that are called 'confinement' by the Buddha.**
>
> **Now, take a mendicant who, quite secluded from sensual pleasures … enters and remains in the first jhana. To this extent the Buddha spoke of creating an opening amid confinement in a qualified sense…."**
>
> – AN 9.42

Nm: The opening is not finding another direction apart from the senses, or denial of the senses. The "opening amidst confinement" is the removal of the ownership of that which confines you. Complete non-appropriation - which begins with the first *jhana*.

So it's not like you find the opening in the aggregates by which you can sort of "slip out" of samsara. No, you *are* confined by everything that appears. *Nama-rupa paccaya vinnana. Vinnana paccaya nama-rupa* - that is the ultimate confinement. So what is, then, the "opening" amidst that, the opening within already being fully buried alive - it is the removal of the ownership of that situation in its entirety. That's why in the first *jhana* there is no sense of "I am" as in "I am entering the first *jhana*". It's not that there is no sense of the five senses - there is, but there's no ownership of it. There are thoughts and thinking, but the traces of ownership have been completely removed on every level. Thus, nobody is confined; there is no confinement anymore. For something to be confined, you need that which confines and that one which is confined, the assumed sense of self. Complete

removal of that ownership and conceit is the subtlest of the openings, so to speak, amidst everything that confines.

Q: That's why it says that the first *jhana* is an opening, that escape - but now, as the sutta continues to state, could one see that there is still confinement there?

Nm: Yes, but now it is getting abstract. If a person develops the first *jhana* they will understand what is the true *okāsā* (opening) among *sambādhe* (confinement) then the principle of other *jhanas* will become apparent. But if somebody tries to understand this [on an abstract level] "This opening and this confinement, then this further opening and this confinement" - none of that will become applicable.

The opening, the escape, from that which confines, is the removal, uprooting, and fading away of ownership and conceit in regard to the senses and their pleasure that you have been depending on. That's why the first *jhana* is enough for arahantship. If you establish your mind upon that first escape and spend a sufficient amount of time in it, you will have uprooted any lust towards anything that was confining you before. But yes, theoretically speaking, one who is established in the first jhana can start thinking about whether there is a more refined opening or escape in regard to this. From the point of view of the second *jhana*, the first is very coarse; from the point of view of the third *jhana*, the second is very coarse, and so on.

So you can use that principle to *remove the ownership*. *Jhana* in itself does not necessarily bring the full uprooting of the sense of "I am" and the sense of "mine." For that you need wisdom.

Theoretically, a person could have *jhanas* without having fully uprooted their underlying tendencies.

Q: So here I am with a pressure of the body, and I want to satisfy it, get rid of that pressure, and feel pleasure rather than this pressure.

Nm: Why is that? What is the burden? It is confinement, you are confined by this pressure, so what do you do? You try to get rid of the pressure by spilling out, letting it outside. That's why you won't find the true opening amidst confinement because you keep acting towards the assumed "opening." The sense pleasures of the external kind are the assumed relief of the pressure here. And that's why people are so psychologically dependent on "scratching the itch." That is the only form of release that they know.

But it is not a release - it's the very reason for your confinement.

The more you try to find release in that way, the more burdened you become, the more dependent on sensuality you become. That's why it's important to realize that this needs to be lived on the level of enduring the pressure, not acting out of it, and calming your mind within it. Withdrawal from the dependence on the pleasure of the assumed external kind is the prerequisite for that pleasure of *jhana*, that genuine release.

> **"As long as these five hindrances are not given up inside themselves, a mendicant regards them as a debt, a disease, a prison, slavery, and a desert crossing.**

> **But when these five hindrances are given up inside themselves, a mendicant regards this as freedom from debt, good health, release from prison, emancipation, and sanctuary.**
>
> **Seeing that the hindrances have been given up in them, joy springs up. Being joyful, happiness springs up. When the mind is full of happiness, the body becomes calm. When the body is calm, they feel bliss. And when blissful, the mind becomes composed.**
>
> **Quite withdrawn from sense pleasures, withdrawn from unwholesome states, he enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thought and thinking and filled with the joy and happiness born of withdrawal…"**
>
> – DN 10

Withdrawing from unwholesome, from the wrong order that you have been assuming, that is the work, and the release of the right kind will occur as a result of it. That's the true "opening amidst confinement." But people don't want to deal with the confinement. They don't want to deal with the pressure or endure it - they want a technique that will give them an experience of pleasure that they will then take to be *jhana*, and then assume that all this work has been done, on account of this special meditation pleasure that they had. That is exactly mirroring the same principle of the sensuality that you have been acting out of. You are still seeking that pleasant thing to be your escape. No - the escape is found by not being, not

maintaining, the dependence upon the wrong order. Then the pleasure of *jhana* will happen:

> **“Quite withdrawn from sense pleasures, withdrawn from unwholesome states, he enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thought and thinking and filled with the joy and happiness born of withdrawal.”**

It does not say: “Not having been withdrawn, still being pressured by sensuality, he gets a technique, he experiences jhana and all his problems just falls away, and it’s a magical experience.”

236hh- Desire To End Desire

> **"And what, monks, is the right effort? (1) There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (2) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the abandonment of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen. (3) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (4) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, culmination, and development of skillful qualities that have arisen: This, monks, is called right effort."**
>
> – SN 45.8

Q: What is the difference between desire- *chanda* and craving- *tanha*?

Nyanamoli: The difference is that *chanda*-desire is a form of zeal, interest, and it can be either wholesome or unwholesome. If you have a desire towards sensuality, that is *kamachanda*-sensual desire, which is not a wholesome desire. So then if you want to be free from sensuality because you started to understand the dissatisfaction of it, then you can have a desire to be free from it, to be free from sensuality and sensual desire.

It's still a form of desire that can make you want to practice the Dhamma. It's a desire that can eventual y result in freedom from sensual desire. *Chanda* is not in itself bad, nor good, it just depends on where you direct it. It's not a question of not having desires as you begin to practice. It's really about having the desires that are directed at the development of the wholesome and the diminishing of the unwholesome.

When you are free from any desire towards sensuality and so on, you will also lose the desire towards the wholesome because that is now what you are. At that point, you don't need to have a desire to develop the wholesome once that wholesome is developed. That's how desire, directed rightly, can result in freedom from desire all together, freedom from *chanda* all together.

> **“Then the brahmin Uṇṇābha approached the Venerable Ānanda… and said:”For what purpose, Master Ānanda, is the holy life lived under the ascetic Gotama?"**
>
> **“It is for the sake of abandoning desire, brahmin, that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One.”**
>
> **“But, Master Ānanda, is there a path, is there a way for the abandoning of this desire- *chanda*?”**
>
> **“There is a path, brahmin, there is a way for the abandoning of this desire.”**
>
> **“But, Master Ānanda, what is the path, what is the way for the abandoning of this desire?”**

"Here, brahmin, a bhikkhu develops the basis for potency that possesses composure due to desire-*chanda* and intentions of striving. He develops the basis for potency that possesses composure due to energy … composure due to mind … composure due to investigation and intentions of striving. This, brahmin, is the path, this is the way for the abandoning of this desire."

"Such being the case, Master Ānanda, the situation is never ending, there is no end. It is impossible that one can abandon desire by means of desire itself."

"Well then, brahmin, I will question you about this matter. Answer as you see t. What do you think, brahmin, did you earlier have the desire, 'I will go to the park,' and after you went to the park, did the corresponding desire subside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you earlier arouse energy, thinking, 'I will go to the park,' and after you went to the park, did the corresponding energy subside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you earlier make up your mind, 'I will go to the park,' and after you went to the park, did the corresponding resolution subside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you earlier make an investigation, 'Shall I go to the park?' and after you went to the park, did the corresponding investigation subside?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is exactly the same, brahmin, with a bhikkhu who is an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached his own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, and is completely liberated through final knowledge. He earlier had the desire for the attainment of arahantship, and when he attained arahantship, the corresponding desire subsided. He earlier had aroused energy for the attainment of arahantship, and when he attained arahantship, the corresponding energy subsided. He earlier had made up his mind to attain arahantship, and when he attained arahantship, the corresponding resolution subsided. He earlier made an investigation for the attainment of arahantship, and when he attained arahantship, the corresponding investigation subsided.

"What do you think, brahmin, such being the case, is the situation never ending or is there an end?"

"Surely, Master Ānanda, such being the case, the situation has an end, and is not never ending.

Magni cent, Master Ānanda!... From today let Master Ānanda remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life."

– SN 51.15

Abandoning unskilful desire is not a matter of choice, it's a matter of directing it towards a certain kind of behaviour, that kind being the *gradual training,* which will then remove any basis for perpetuation of unskilful desire later on.

In other words, when you become aware of your illness, you need to have a desire to be cured. That desire will make you look for a doctor, find the right medicine, and then sustain the application of the medicine on the basis of desire for health. And then once you're cured, and healed, and there is absolutely not even the slightest trace of your illness left, you will have no more desire to be cured because you're cured. However, if while you're ill and you think, “Okay, so being free from illness means having no desire to be cured, thus, I will have no desire to be cured”, that way of thinking will prevent you from curing yourself.

In the beginning, a person cannot distinguish between bad or good desire. That's why you need to start with sense restraint, as we always say. But you don't want to be trying to not have desires. You want to be trying to see where your desires are directed. And if it's a desire for physical pleasures, of the lustful kind. That's a desire you should not cultivate, that's the desire you should abandon, not welcome, not entertain, endure until it passes without acting out of it.

An *anagami,* who is free from sensual desire, is not free from *chanda*. He's free from desire towards the sense objects of pleasures. In other words, freedom from sensuality doesn't mean absence of *chanda* of any kind, it means loss of interest and zeal for the sensual type of pleasure. Why? Because the

gratification has been fully understood, the danger has been fully understood and the escape has been fully understood.

> **"That any brahmins or contemplatives who do not discern, as it actually is, the gratification of sensuality as gratification, the drawback of sensuality as drawback, the escape from sensuality as escape, would themselves understand sensuality or would rouse another with the truth so that, in line with what he has practiced, he would understand sensuality: That is impossible. But that any brahmins or contemplatives who discern, as it actually is, the gratification of sensuality as gratification, the drawback of sensuality as drawback, the escape from sensuality as escape, would themselves understand sensuality or would rouse another with the truth so that, in line with what he has practiced, he would understand sensuality: That is possible."**
>
> – MN 13

It's not that an *anagami* or an *arahant* have no concept anymore of what physical pleasure would feel like, it's that they have no interest in it anymore on the level of the mind, intent or thought. They're absolutely free from any zeal that a person not free from sensuality would otherwise have. An untrained person who has a sensual thought, is immediately pressured to act out of that thought and pursue sensual pleasures, because there exists an inclination towards it, there is a welcoming of that prospect of pleasure, the possibility of gratification.

That inclination can only be abandoned through seeing the danger of that delighting towards sense objects.

You will not have an interest in ingesting poison if you understood the deadliness of the poison. Even though the texture and taste of it hasn't changed, the pleasure hasn't changed, but your understanding now of seeing it as a poison, that has changed, and so you have absolutely no zeal towards that kind of pleasure whatsoever. You have no interest in it.

Q: A person might say, “Well, I understand that sensuality is bad. Yet, I'm still attracted.”

Nm: For as long as you haven't fully understood the gratification, the danger and the escape, you will still value sensuality, which means that you should not claim that you understood sensuality. Because if you do make such a statement, that means you're contradicting yourself. If you fully understood those three aspects, there would be no *chanda* towards sensuality left, there would only be *chanda* towards renunciation, towards seclusion, towards further abandonment.

A person might think, “Yes, I understand the peril of sensuality”. Okay, fine. Ask yourself the next question.

“So am I free from any form of delight, welcoming, zeal, interest, curiosity even towards pleasures that come on account of objects of the senses that are provocative of lust?”. “No, I don't think I'm free of that. Or I'm not sure if I'm free that.”, that means you're not free of that, that means that you should not think you understood it, and that you need to make more of an effort in the direction of understanding.

Nobody denies that you will have some insight or some degree of insight into sensuality once you start restraining, but don't

think that's freedom until you know, “I am free. I don't want this, this is truly something I have no interest in anymore, quite the opposite”.

You might spend most of your day not having interest in sensual pursuits, but are you still liable to having interest in sensual pursuits? If so, you're not outside of the domain of sensual desire.

You always want to look at that level of *liability*, “Am I liable to become careless and interested in sensual pursuits again? Well , maybe?”. Well , there you go, you're not free from doubt in regard to it, which means you're not free from it.

> **". .Then Ānanda said to the nun:**
>
> **"Sister, this body is produced by food. Relying on food, you should give up food. This body is produced by craving. Relying on craving, you should give up craving. This body is produced by conceit. Relying on conceit, you should give up conceit. This body is produced by sex. The Buddha spoke of breaking o everything to do with sex.**
>
> **‘This body is produced by food. Relying on food, you should give up food.’ This is what I said, but why did I say it? Take a mendicant who reflects properly on the food that they eat: ’Not for fun, indulgence, adornment, or decoration, but only to sustain this body, to avoid harm, and to support the holy life. In this way, I shall put an end to old discomfort and not give rise to new discomfort, and I will live**

blamelessly and at ease.' After some time, relying on food, they give up food. That's why I said what I said.

'This body is produced by *tanha*-craving. Relying on craving, you should give up craving.' This is what I said, but why did I say it? Take a mendicant who hears this: 'They say that the mendicant named so-and-so has realized the undefiled freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom in this very life. And they live having realized it with their own insight due to the ending of defilements.'

They think: 'Oh, when will I too realize the undefiled freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom in this very life. …' After some time, relying on craving, they give up craving. That's why I said what I said.

'This body is produced by conceit. Relying on conceit, you should give up conceit.' This is what I said, but why did I say it? Take a mendicant who hears this: 'They say that the mendicant named so-and-so has realized the undefiled freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom in this very life. And they live having realized it with their own insight due to the ending of defilements.' They think:

'Well, that venerable person can realize the undefiled freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom in this very life. … Why can't I?' After some time, relying on conceit, they give up conceit. That's why I said what I said.

> **‘This body is produced by sex. The Buddha spoke of breaking o everything to do with sex.’" -**
>
> – AN 4.159

As for *tanha*, it's subtler than *chanda*. *Tanha* is on a different level. *Chanda* is kind of an active quality that you either carelessly engage with on account of your past behaviour that hasn't been restrained, or something you can cultivate, as the Buddha would say, " he generates desire… for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen…".

You can reflect on why it's good to be cured, why it's good to make the effort towards abandoning the unwholesome and cultivating the wholesome, why it's good to practice the gradual training, why it's good to be virtuous and sense restraint, and because of those reflections you will be generating a desire to develop those practices.

Tanha is more on an immediate level of your attitude towards your present enduring feeling, whatever it is.

That attitude is always rooted in *resistance*. If there is craving for pleasure, that is rooted in you resisting the current feeling, which is not necessarily unpleasant, but it's not sufficient, i.e. the pleasure, it's not sufficient, which is why you crave for more pleasure. Which means, it's painful.

Any resistance is painful, and with the mind of resistance, if you experience pleasure, you will by default be resisting it, because by default, you want more of it. With the mind not free from *tanha*, when you experience pain, by default you're

resisting it, because you don't want any of it. You want it to completely go away. With the mind not free from *tanha*, when you experience a neutral feeling, you will automatically resist it, you will incline towards oblivion, towards ignoring it, towards turning away from it, because you don't understand it. *Tanha,* practical y speaking, is always that resistance on the level of what you're currently feeling.

Q: Even if you're feeling pleasure, you're still resisting it. It's not good enough for you.

Nm: Absolutely. That's why if you're not free from craving, every pleasure will be underlined by craving for more. With the presence of resistance, there is the presence of dissatisfaction, presence of *tanha* means *dukkha* is there, presence of *dukkha* means *tanha* is there.

If *tanha* is still present, that means that there is still resistance to whatever feeling is there for you at the time, and that's why you suffer, not because of what is felt but because of that resistance. And why would you be resisting? Why is it that you're not content with an agreeable feeling that is present? Why is it, that by default, the mind wants more of it? It's because of the wrong view in regard to what pleasure is, what sensuality is, what gratification is. Sensuality is a form of *upadana*, an assumption, it's a view, it's basically the values that you uphold throughout your day to day existence.

Sensual desire is felt unpleasantly and that's why you want to gratify your senses, because non-gratified senses hurt. However, your resistance is the suffering there, and so if you stop resisting the non gratified senses, they'l stop hurting and

there will be no suffering there despite the senses being gratified.

You don't see that the suffering is on the level of your *resistance*. You think suffering exists because there is no gratification of the senses, and so you go out and seek gratification, and that's why you keep perpetuating your suffering.

First, you need to stop seeking out the gratification of the senses. So that your *resistance* to the non-gratified senses becomes apparent as the cause of your suffering. And then you realise, “Oh, I stop resisting. It stops hurting”. Which means that gratifying the senses becomes redundant.

The habit of resistance (craving) perpetuates the sensuality view that non-gratified senses cause suffering and gratified senses means freedom from suffering.

Tanha feeds *kāmupādāna*- the assumption of sense desire, and the *kāmupādāna* feeds *tanha*, that's why it's beginningless. It's a vicious circle, it has no beginning. It's not that you were pure, then you develop *tanha*, and then you develop *upadana*. No, you start already infected, perverted, mistaken, confused, assumed.

Corruption is beginningless. And that's why if you understand it, if you uproot the gratuitous assumption or the craving, both will be uprooted and cannot revert back. The uprooting is irreversible.

Ignorance:

> **"Bhikkhus, this is said: ’A first point of ignorance, bhikkhus, is not seen such that before this there was**

no ignorance and afterward it came into being. Still, ignorance is seen to have a speci c condition.

"I say, bhikkhus, that ignorance has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for ignorance? It should be said: the five hindrances. The five hindrances, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the five hindrances? It should be said: the three kinds of misconduct. The three kinds of misconduct, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the three kinds of misconduct? It should be said: non-restraint of the sense faculties. Non-restraint of the sense faculties, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for non-restraint of the sense faculties? It should be said: lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension. Lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension?

It should be said: "attention without the right perspective"- *ayonisomanasikara*.

***Ayonisomanasikara*, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for *ayonisomanasikara*? It should be said: lack of faith. Lack of faith, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for lack of faith? It should be said: not hearing the**

good Dhamma. Not hearing the good Dhamma, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for not hearing the good Dhamma? It should be said: not associating with good people.

– AN 10.61

Craving:

"Bhikkhus, it is said: 'A first point of craving for existence, bhikkhus, is not seen such that before this there was no craving for existence and afterward it came into being.' Still, craving for existence is seen to have a specific condition.

"I say, bhikkhus, that craving for existence has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for craving for existence? It should be said: ignorance. Ignorance, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for ignorance? It should be said: the five hindrances ... (as in 10:61) ... And what is the nutriment for not hearing the good Dhamma? It should be said: not associating with good people.

– AN 10.62

247hh- Discerning The Body For Uprooting Of Sensuality

The reason why a person's mind would still be dependent on the pleasure of the senses despite knowing how little satisfaction they provide or how much danger they entail, is fundamentally because they do not really know where the problem is. You can know that the pleasures that you get from the sense objects are not satisfactory but you still don't understand the extent of the sense objects, you don't understand the extent of the pleasure that you are chasing. In other words, when you think about the dissatisfactory nature of the sense objects, that is not entirely accurate because if it were, then you would understand the danger and lose desire towards it. The problem with still being attracted towards that which you know does not result in happiness but instead in doing you more harm than good, the problem of you still being addicted to the pleasures of the senses is that you don't see where that pleasure begins, you only see what you are used to seeing on the level of the sense objects but there is more to that picture that is left out because of which your addiction is not uprooted, and that which is left out is the relationship with you and your body.

When there is a sensual pull towards sense objects for pleasure, at the same time, your body and senses are there peripherally enduring as a basis from which you are pressured. The relationship, on that peripheral level, between you and that body that is pressuring you towards sense objects, that's what needs to be understood. The reason why that is so hard to understand is because the body as a unity of sense organs does

not and cannot appear on the level of sense objects. Your dependence on the pleasures of the sense objects is determined by and dependent upon the pressure that your body exerts on your mind. It is a wild animal that you are tied to, it's inseparable from your mind, and it wants to go left and right and eat this and that, and it will pressure you until it gets what it wants.

It's not about removing the agreeable and enticing things from the world to be free, it's about taming that which pressures you because of which you are not free. That's why you are still attracted to sense objects despite knowing how little satisfaction sense objects provide. Your knowledge that “This is dissatisfactory” is limited and pertains only within the sense objects and you are failing to see the bigger picture of this whole underlying pressure of your own body and the pleasure that you depend on. You are failing to see the wild animal underneath. You don't see that as a problem, you only think that the sense objects that you become obsessed about, are the problem. No, that's pretty much the end result of the problem already being there and fully controlling you. That's why sense restraint - not engaging in these sense objects that are inciting of lust, etc, is the prerequisite which will help you to see the roots of the problem, which is the body, the senses, that are attracted to the pleasure that they are used to, to those unwholesome pleasures that you have been carelessly feeding them.

If you don't engage with the pleasures that they are used to, their dependence on that will cease because they haven't been engaging with it. If the animal is engaged in a perpetual wild behaviour it will become used to that and that's going to be its

norm, but if the animal is not allowed to engage with these sense objects which are provocative of lust and aversion, it will calm down whether it wants to or not because things of the agitating nature are now things that the animal has not been engaging with. If you want to uproot the dependence on the pleasure of the sense objects, you have to uproot the dependence on the pleasure of this body, its agreeability, your assumption of ownership, and not seeing it peripherally as a thing which endures there on its own, with its own thirsts.

You need to disown the body but that can only be done on the level of that correct peripheral recognition of what the body is. It cannot be done on the level of observing the body with your senses because you are not observing the body, you are observing the sense objects which require the body, and even if you are super attentive to every sensation that occurs, that's all on the level of sense objects and that's why none of that which is underneath it, which is that necessary requirement for perceiving the sense object, none of that will be affected by that practise and by those efforts. In the same sense that an eye cannot see itself, for as long as you believe that you can, you will be engaged in an extremely futile attempt of trying to access that which is inaccessible, i.e. trying to access your sense organs on the level of sense objects, which is a contradiction in terms. You need to see/discern the body on the level of the senses, on the level of the framework of the world of the sense objects, and that will fully purify the relationship between you and the body that appears peripherally while you are experiencing sense objects.

For as long as you have sense objects, the body, the unity of the sense organs, is peripheral to that. It's always the background to

the domain of the sense objects and that's where you need to discern it. It's not about examining the individual organs and looking at it with other sense organs, it's about understanding the six sense base, the body as that thing which is there that needs to be tamed on that level of the peripheral. Through not engaging with sense objects that are pulling you, that pressure that the body exerts over you will diminish and the clearer you will see it on that level which is revealed through sense restraint. The more you get used to it, the less pressure there will be, the body will be seen correctly and any possibility of pleasure to be accessed or experienced through that body will not be something that will interest your mind, because the mind would see the extent of the danger if it chooses to go in that direction.

So just to summarise, the first thing you want to do is, if you want to stop chasing the sense pleasures, you start practising mindfulness of the body correctly, not as an observational technique of watching sensations, but by seeing it peripherally as an enduring bag of skin which contains the sense organs that are attracted to the various sense pleasures, that they get in their respective domains. You want to learn to discern the body as it is, as a thing in the world on the level of the peripheral, without trying to attend to it directly, which is impossible. You will get to see that body peripherally, if you have been practising sense restraint sufficiently, guarding of the sense doors, being moderate in eating, watchful and dwelling in solitude - because company and the world requires your mind to be on the level of sense objects, and if you have not been sufficiently withdrawn from that, then there is not enough space for you to step back and get to see this body as a thing that endures there in the world as a basis for all the sense

object experiences. You will not be able to see the relationship between the two.

Now when you have been sufficiently withdrawn in this way, you can then disown the pressure and pull of those individual organs, you can see them as five individual animals, like the simile that the Buddha gave. You can see them as wild animals that need training. People who are not withdrawn from the sense objects, see ‘the animals’ only in abstraction, which means that they do not see them. They don't see their sense organ as an independent entity which pretty much has its own life, desires/needs, that they need to tame and control. So each time there is a pull from a sense object, then they are the ones that are pulled by sense objects, they don't see anything in between because those sense organs, those animals, do not appear on the level of sense objects that you are so used to looking at and measuring your existence by. That's why there is the encouragement for the practice of sense restraint and correct mindfulness, for discerning those peripheral signs and features of that body which exist on the level of ‘around that which you are attending to’, that's what the body is.

That's also what the Buddha meant when speaking about knowing the body to the extent necessary for final knowledge. The measure of that extent is how familiar you are with the phenomenon of the body on the level of the peripheral, how steady your mind is in discerning the presence of the body for what it is on its own without trying to attend to it directly, without trying to make it a sense object. If you can discern that extent sufficiently then you will no longer be underlied by lust, craving and thirst of the individual senses.

By not discerning the senses and by being on the level of sense objects that's how you are underlined by all the asavas. They underlie you because you go over them, and then they direct and push you. So you want to develop your mind to the extent necessary where you are not underlied by them, but when you underlie them, so to speak. Like in one sutta where it says that the arahants mind is not overwhelmed by things, by pressures, he is the one who overwhelms them. That is what is meant by establishing the right order, seeing what comes first, seeing the body on the level of the peripheral, as that which is first and not losing that context, despite what happens with your individual attention. So whatever you are attending to, whatever pressure there is, desire for pleasure and so on, the order that is now determined by your knowledge, now does not change, you still see that peripheral body as the basis for all of this that is happening, and all you need to do is protect that order so that there is no room to become underlied by lust, aversion, distraction, which is the perverted order.

Practice that sufficiently and lust, aversion, distraction will completely fade because they have not been maintained through the perversion of the order. That's why Ven. Ananda said that “Sensuality is a perversion of perception”, i.e. putting the sense objects first and everything else measured through that as second, and not seeing the body peripherally, the necessary basis for sense organs as that which is first, structurally speaking. If you un-pervert that perception there is then no room for lust to breed and expand

> **“…I’ve got a burning desire for pleasure; My mind is on fire! Please, out of compassion, Gotama, tell me how to quench the flames?”**

“Your mind is on fire because of a perversion of perception. Turn away from the feature of things that’s attractive, provoking lust. See all sankharas as other/foreign, as suffering and not-self. Extinguish the great fire of lust, don’t burn up again and again. With a mind unified and serene, reflect on the unattractive aspects of the body. With recollection of the body, be full of disenchantment. Contemplate the signless, give up the underlying tendency to conceit; and when you comprehend conceit, you will live at peace.”

– SN 8.4

257hh- Only The Noble Truth Of Pain

Q: The four noble truths, you're saying, are four aspects to one insight.

Nm: The insight being the way out of suffering. You see how to escape from it without trying to get rid of it. If you want to understand the way out of suffering, first you need to understand the suffering, and you can't understand the suffering if you can't give up the pressure, the need, the urge, the craving to get rid of it, to manage it, to prevent it. You need to endure and not act out of the pressure towards more pleasure when you're feeling agreeable. You need to endure and not act out of the pressure towards getting rid of the pain when you're feeling disagreeable. You need to endure and not act out of the pressure to ignore the neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling. That type of endurance is the hardest thing to do.

> **“Patient endurance is the supreme austerity. Khantī paramaṁ tapo titikkhā..”**
>
> – Dhp179-196

That's why people find sense-restraint difficult because you have to endure that pressure of craving. That's why they find it difficult to NOT try and manage their suffering, but instead explain it or psychologize it, because that endurance is very difficult. That's why people find it really hard to not distract themselves when they're feeling neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant, to not find something to do, to not find an activity to keep them occupied, because it just becomes too unpleasant.

If you endure things on the level of not acting out of craving towards whatever is felt or out of unwholesome intentions, you are practising the highest of all ascetic practices, and the only one that matters. That is the endurance that results in the uprooting of craving and the cessation of dukkha.

If you endure things on that right level, you will not need much of an instruction because you already have the right basis, which can lead to the obvious aspects of your situation being revealed, such as, “Okay, so I am liable to suffering and everything I've been doing so far, has not uprooted it, has not even been in the direction of uprooting that suffering, it was all only on the level of management and distraction from it, and the Dhamma is the direction of uprooting, so it's completely the opposite direction in which I have been going so far.” But for that insight to arise, you first need to endure things on the right level.

You have to understand the suffering first, in order to see the way out. In order for you to understand suffering, you need to stop trying to get rid of it and trying to manage the suffering. You need to allow it to be, to endure, because it takes time to understand it. By covering up the suffering, by trying to get rid of it, by trying to manage it, you are not uprooting it, if you were, it would not return.

Can you endure the pain without expressing it, without trying to repress it or trying to get rid of it, without psychologizing it, without hateful thoughts, without turning away and ignoring it? Can you just stay with it?

Q: Can I endure my liability to suffer without doing anything on account of it? I could say, “Ok, I am now going to endure the

suffering so that I can get rid of it!”

Nm: So, you started enduring the suffering, maybe for one second, in the right way? And then the next second, you fall into, “Now I'm enduring it because I want to get rid of it”. So what do you do then? Well, you include that into your endurance of suffering that you don't want to get rid of.

You can endure the suffering, rightly, but then you can endure it wrongly if you become motivated by different reasons, such as, you're not enduring it for its own sake, you're doing it to get rid of it, which means that you have just returned to the old attitude. So how do you stop that? By enduring it, it's not going to be perfect but for as long as you know that you are supposed to endure it without acting out of it, then even that mind that makes that ‘endurance’ as an act of craving, will calm down if you endure it sufficiently enough without turning away.

Q: **“...This is the dukkha ariya·sacca/noble truth of suffering:**
1- jāti/birth is dukkha,
2-jarā/decaying is dukkha,
3-maraṇa/death is dukkha,
4-association with the disliked is dukkha,
5-separation from the liked is dukkha,
6-not getting what one wants is dukkha;
7-in short, the pañcupādānakkhandhā/ five assumed aggregates are dukkha...”

Nm: Basically, your life is the basis for your dukkha. That's it. It's not like particular things are the basis for your dukkha, the ‘five aggregates’ are the basis for the dukkha. In other words, you haven't done anything wrong, you were just born. Birth is

dukkha, that's it. Even if you don't do anything particularly wrong, you're already affected with dukkha because you're already here. Everything else that comes throughout your life is kind of a secondary reminder of what the dukkha already is and that you are already liable to it. That's why a person needs to develop the state of mind that recognises this and restrains themselves from trying to address those myriad of individual instances of suffering, “Oh, he said, that upset me, she didn't do that which upset me, I'll go talk to her, I'll tell him off,….all so that I can address the suffering”.

> **“He abused me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me.” Those who harbour such thoughts will never end their hatred.**
> **“He abused me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me.” Those who do not harbour such thoughts will end their hatred.**
> **Hatred never ends through hatred; by non-hatred alone does it end. This is an eternal truth."**
>
> – Dhp 1 Yamaka Vagga

All of these things that you experienced throughout the life that involved suffering are not the reason for your suffering, if they were, freedom from suffering would not be possible. It's your craving in regard to how you feel on account of these things in the world, that's the root of suffering. For as long as you keep acting out towards him or her or this or that, or particular instances of suffering, you're not allowing yourself to see it on the right level, which means you cannot address it correctly. You're still blaming the individual circumstances.

A view needs to be developed, whereby you recognise that it's not about instances of suffering, it's about the fact that you are liable to suffer. That's it. If it's not this instance that you suffer in regard to, it would have been something else and it will be something else. You, trying to manage and perfect your ways of managing your environment, the way you speak to people, the way they speak to you, all of that is basically rooted in the fact that you know deep down, that you don't know the escape from suffering, and you just want to minimise the pain, you want to manage it. And for as long as you value that management, you will not force yourself to look for the direction of uprooting suffering. That's the trap of thinking, “Oh, this management technique is helpful. My psychotherapy is helpful, psychology is helpful, watching my breath is helpful, etc...”. All these management's are helpful to manage your pain, but if you become dependent on management of the symptoms, you are not going to be able to endure the symptoms so to reveal the source of your illness, because you immediately cover up the symptoms, you manage it, you take a pill, you deal with the symptoms, and they're gone and now you don't see the illness and think that ‘you suffering less than you used to’ means that the illness is ending, yet you are still as liable to dukkha as before, that hasn't changed.

You need to endure the symptom by resisting the pressure to manage it and by not managing the discomfort, you get to understand, “Right, now it's this that I'm suffering over, yesterday was something else, tomorrow it will be something else, the point is, I am liable to suffering and even if I perfectly address this and that issue, I cannot prevent circumstances from making me uncomfortable in the future and that's the

problem.” You can realise that it's not about particular sufferings, it's about the nature of suffering.

Q: I am infected by craving and affected by feeling. I am thus liable to suffering.

Nm: These particular instances of affections are just the reminders of your situation that's already within that liability. Birth, as in manifestation, is already suffering, you are manifested from the moment you're born. For as long as your manifestation is here, dukkha is here. That's it. Even if you don't experience anything uncomfortable, no incidents, you are still within dukkha, you are still liable. That's why a person doesn't need great misfortunes and so on to recognise the nature of their situation, “I am liable to suffer”.

Q: I'm affected by things. Things happen. I feel them.

Nm: You feel them either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Which means at any given time, there is some pressure placed on you. Even though you might say, “Oh, see now it's all fine. I'm not affected by suffering.” , but just ask yourself, “Am I feeling something? Yes”, Well, to that extent, suffering is implicit, you are pressured to that extent. You are liable to feelings. Can you even conceive being in control of your feelings? Saying I should feel this and I should not feel that? No, that's only on the level of wishful thinking. Liability to feelings means liability to suffering. You have no say in what feeling arises and how long it persists. You know that they change. For example, you might have a pleasant feeling, you had it so many times before, but you also know that it has to cease at some point, which means, if you're honest with yourself, that through a mere change of

feeling, whatever feeling is there, you will have to experience suffering to some extent.

Are you able then to not be pressured by anything that you feel at any given time? Even pleasure pressures you. It makes you nervous, “What if I lose this? What if it doesn't last long enough? I want more of it? How to protect it? How do I get it again?” That's not actually a peaceful state. Pain, obviously it's not a peaceful state either, and in terms of neutral feeling, one thinks that it's boring, which is very much not peaceful, although it's peaceful, there's nothing happening. Yet, nothing happening is the most frightening thing for the ignorant mind.

Q: There are just three types of feeling, just three types of pain.

Nm: Well, three types of feeling means one type of pain, one dukkha. As it says in the Suttas, “Whatever is felt counts as suffering in the discipline of the noble one.” If you have the right view, if you understand the nature of feelings, you understand that whatever is felt is unpleasant because it's felt.

> **“..Good, good, bhikkhu! These three feelings have been spoken of by me: pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. These three feelings have been spoken of by me. And I have also said: ‘Whatever is felt is included in suffering.’ That has been stated by me with reference to the impermanence of sankharas. That has been stated by me with reference to sankharas being subject to destruction … to sankharas being subject to vanishing … to sankharas being subject to fading away … to sankharas being subject to cessation … to sankharas being subject to change…”**

– SN 36.11

Q: If you feel, that means you are affected, and therefore you can know that you are infected, you have a disease.

Nm: Exactly. Feeling is a symptom of an underlying problem. You're subjected to and imprisoned by, trapped within a disease. But if you don't see that as a symptom, as I said, if you still feel justified and have the view that management of suffering, management of symptoms, doing something about it so to overcome it when it arises, if you don't abandon that view, and if you don't restrain yourself, you're not going to see how deep the illness goes. Which means you're not going to see the source of it.

Q: If I am aware of feeling, I am aware of dukkha.

Nm: If you're aware of feeling correctly. What is the feeling? Most people would, through those views of management, proliferation and confusing information for understanding, would think that feelings are physical sensations that they have in their body. No, feeling is a state of mind, feeling is always mental. Feelings in regard to the body are always mental. And there's only three types of feeling on that level, which is the level of feeling agreeable, disagreeable, and neither-agreeable-or-disagreeable.

> **"...It's for one who feels that I declare: 'This is suffering' ... 'This is the origin of suffering' ... 'This is the cessation of suffering' ... 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering...'.**
>
> – AN 3.61

Q: “This is the dukkha·samudaya ariya·sacca/the noble truth of the origin of suffering:
1-Taṇhā/urge/inclination/craving,
2-which perpetuates being,
3-connected with craving and passion,
4-finding delight here or there,
5-that is to say: kāma-taṇhā/sensual desire, bhava-taṇhā/desire for being and vibhava-taṇhā/desire for non-being.”

Nm: That brings us to the point I've already said, the origin, the source, the basis, the necessary condition for presence of dukkha is presence of craving. It's not what you've seen, smelt, tasted, touched, thought about, remembered, etc. It's about craving towards whatever is felt there and then, that's the root of dukkha. The world or samsara is not the dukkha. It's not the cause of suffering. It's your attitude, on that emotional level, towards samsara, that's what suffering is. It's your craving towards it. What craving? Craving for more pleasure in pleasant feeling, craving for less pain in a painful feeling, craving for ignorance and distraction in a neutral feeling. That's it, that's the root of the entire universe of suffering. But in order to get to the root, you need to stop acting out of that craving, which is trying to manage your suffering.

The gradual training, the prerequisites in the form of a lifestyle that the Buddha outlined, is the way of rounding up, towards the centre of that suffering, which is your craving, which is an internal thing. However, if your lifestyle still revolves around the pursuit of sense pleasures, management of your suffering, trying to get rid of pain, acting out of pain through unwholesome acts of anger, distracting activities, avoidance of

boredom and solitude, etc. There's no way you're going to uproot craving, when you're still physically, still passionately engaged in maintaining it. First, you need to physically stop acting out of it, then verbally, then mentally, then you can eventually see the roots, see your own attitude towards what's currently felt.

You want to act out of craving because you feel confined within it. You can escape from that confinement by giving up sensuality, when it's pleasant, by giving up management of pain when it's unpleasant, and by giving up distraction and indolence when it's neutral. That will reveal your confining situation and the fundamental resistance you have towards the senses that we spoke of before. And if you continue not to act out of craving, the mind will calm down within that and then you get to see the escape.

> **“Near Sāvatthī. As he was standing to one side, Pañcālacaṇḍa the deva’s son recited this verse in the Blessed One’s presence:”Truly in a confining place, he found an opening—the one of extensive wisdom, the awakened one who awakened to jhāna, the chief bull, withdrawn, the sage."**
>
> **The Buddha:“Even in a confining place they find it, the Dhamma for the attainment of Nibbana. Those who have gained recollection, are rightly composed.”**
>
> – SN 2.7

That's wisdom, it's not a magical result of some method or some accidental insight. When you get to see dukkha for what it is

through your act of non-craving, then that craving, that dukkha will begin to evaporate because it requires you to ignore it for its maintenance. You remove it indirectly by not providing a basis for craving to grow and then it will dry up.

Q: **This is the dukkha·nirodha ariya·sacca/the noble truth of the cessation of suffering:**
1-the complete virāga/dispassion,
2-nirodha/cessation,
3-cāgo/abandoning,
4-paṭinissaggo/giving up,
5-mutti/release and
6-anālayo/detachment from that very taṇhā.

Nm: Cessation of craving means cessation of the possibility to suffer on account of anything, that the senses, the aggregates, the world brings you, good or bad, doesn't matter. You cannot suffer because you cannot crave.

Q: **This is the dukkha·nirodha·gāminī paṭipada ariya·sacca/ the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering: just this ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga/ noble eightfold path, that is to say:**
1-sammā·diṭṭhi/right view,
2-sammā·saṅkappa/right resolve,
3-sammā·vācā/right speech,
4-sammā·kammanta/right action,
5-sammā·ājīva/right livelihood,
6-sammā·vāyāma/right effort,
7-sammā·sati/ right recollection,
8-sammā·samādhi/ right composure.

Nm: The right view comes first. You need to know, “The root of the craving is not in the world. It's not due to insufficient management or not having a perfect meditation technique or something else. It's in the craving towards what I'm feeling, nothing else.” Therefore, you first need to stop acting out of craving, and then your resolves, your speech, actions, livelihood and efforts need to start matching that principle. That's the noble eightfold path.

Then in the pleasure, there will just be the pleasure, there will be no more implicit craving for wanting more of it. There's nothing more there's nothing less because you're not resisting it, nor leaning towards it. It's not touching you, it's not yours anymore, which means it's not pressuring you. There's nothing wanted in regard to it and nothing not wanted in regard to it either. Not touching or being touched by it, it is no longer felt.

> **"...Ven. Udayin said to Ven. Sariputta, "But what is the pleasure here, my friend, where there is nothing felt?"**
>
> **"Just that is the pleasure here, my friend: where there is nothing felt..."**
>
> – AN 9.34

258hh- Simile of The Son’s Flesh

SN 12.63 Puttamansa Sutta: A Son's Flesh:

> **“At Savatthi…”There are these four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical food, gross or refined; contact as the second, mental intention the third, and consciousness the fourth. These are the four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born.**
>
> **“And how is physical food to be regarded? Suppose a couple, husband & wife, taking a few provisions, were to travel through a desert. With them would be their only dear baby son. Then the few provisions of the couple going through the desert would be used up while there was still a stretch of the desert yet to be crossed. The thought would occur to them, ‘Our few provisions are used up while there is still a stretch of this desert yet to be crossed. What if we were to kill our only dear baby son, and make dried meat. That way, chewing on the flesh of our son, at least the two of us would make it through this desert. Otherwise, all three of us would perish.’ So they would kill their only dear baby son, and make dried meat. Chewing on the flesh of their son, they would make it through the desert. While eating the flesh of their only son, they would beat their breasts,**

crying, ‘Where have you gone, our only dear baby son? Where have you gone, our only dear baby son?’ Now what do you think, monks: Would that couple eat that food playfully or for intoxication, or for putting on bulk, or for beautification?”

“No, lord.”

“Wouldn’t they eat that food simply for the sake of making it through that desert?”

“Yes, lord.”

"In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of physical food to be regarded. When physical food is understood, passion for the five cords of sensual pleasures is understood. When passion for the five cords of sensual pleasure is understood, there is no fetter bound by which a disciple of the noble ones would come back again to this world.

"And how is the nutriment of contact to be regarded? Suppose a flayed cow were to stand leaning against a wall. The creatures living in the wall would chew on it. If it were to stand leaning against a tree, the creatures living in the tree would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to water, the creatures living in the water would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to the air, the creatures living in the air would chew on it. For wherever the flayed cow were to stand exposed, the creatures living there would chew on it. In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of contact to be regarded. When the

nutriment of contact is understood, the three feelings, pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain are understood. When the three feelings are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.

"And how is the nutriment of mental intention to be regarded? Suppose there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than a man's height, full of embers that were neither flaming nor smoking, and a man were to come along, loving life, hating death, loving pleasure, resisting pain, and two strong men, having grabbed him by the arms, were to drag him to the pit of embers. To get far away would be that man's intention, far away would be his wish, far away would be his aspiration. Why is that? Because he would realize, 'If I fall into this pit of glowing embers, I will meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain.' In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of mental intention to be regarded. When the nutriment of mental intention is understood, the three forms of craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being are understood. When the three forms of craving are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.

"And how is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded? Suppose that, having arrested a thief, a criminal, they were to show him to the king: 'This is a thief, a criminal for you, your majesty. Impose on him whatever punishment you like.' So the king

would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears. Then the king would say at noon, ‘Men, how is that man?’ ‘Still alive, your majesty.’ So the king would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him at noon with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him at noon with a hundred spears. Then the king would say in the evening, ‘Men, how is that man?’ ‘Still alive, your majesty.’ So the king would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears. Now what do you think, monks: Would that man, being shot with three hundred spears a day, experience pain and distress from that cause?”

“Even if he were to be shot with only one spear, lord, he would experience pain and distress from that cause, to say nothing of three hundred spears.”

“In the same way, I tell you, monks, is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded. When the nutriment of consciousness is understood, name&form are understood. When name&form are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.”

Q: How to develop complete dispassion towards food?

Nm: By developing that context that the “son’s flesh simile” outlined. That will prevent you from having any passion towards food. The simile is not just some shocking poetry. No, imagine eating your own child, how would that feel while you

are trying to survive? Now take that context and apply to any food you eat. That's how it should feel, that's the context that you need to sustain. Why? Because the mind will completely turn away from any enjoyment, amusement and any lust towards edible food, edible nutriment, which in return will completely remove any attachment and desire towards the five cords of sensual pleasure because that's what it all comes down to, your consumption of pleasure.

You wouldn't be lost in your consumption of food, you would eat only to the point of overcoming hunger for survival. You wouldn't eat for the sake of eating, for the sake of chewing, for the sake of enjoying, you would only have one goal in your mind. So whenever you eat, always bring that context up, even before you start eating, bring that context up, and then you'll see whether you need to eat and how much to eat, and if there is any passion towards what you're eating. There won't be passion there if you sustain this context because it cannot survive in that environment.

Who knows, maybe their child tasted very nice, in terms of the actual taste, but it doesn't mean that at any given time, mother and father who loved their child, could have enjoyed it. So it's not that the mouth won't perceive agreeability of texture and taste, but in any case, that's not the basis for passion. Loss of context is the basis for passion for agreeability of taste.

Q: Should I be concerned about how I'm eating?

Nm: No, I wouldn't worry about the way you're eating. If the context is there, it doesn't matter which way you're eating.

Q: Would it be useful to try to think about the process of the consumption, like, thinking the food is going inside the body and not going inside 'Me', or it's for the body which isn't "mine", and it's not for my enjoyment and so on?

Nm: All of that is kind of psychologizing. All of those "insights" and the way you can describe it are fine, if the context is there. The context of eating for the right reason only, not too much, not too little, not overthinking it, certainly not giving in to the enjoyment, craving and emotional dependence on agreeable food. But if that context is not there, then, you can analyse it, visualise it in certain ways, and you can contemplate how it's just going into the body which is not yours, etc, but fundamentally, the passion is still there. So that's why the Buddha gave such a drastic simile. All those kinds of thoughts that you try to use when eating, although true, won't work, because the lust is rooted deeper than that. What will work is when you don't want to eat it, but you have to and what will work even more when you don't want to eat it, but you have to and what you have to eat is what is dearest to you. It's not meant to be eaten, so then there will not be even a grain of your being that would want to be eating it, you will only eat to survive. Purely. Same with the simile of the charcoal pit and burning embers, if two men come and drag you towards that pit, your mind would want to be anywhere else except there. Intention would go in any direction except to the pit.

Q: Why can't I just enjoy my food? Why can't I just eat it?

Nm: Because it doesn't belong to you. Your body doesn't belong to you. So how can you eat the food as if it's yours? You can enjoy it if you want. It's not like you cannot. Yes, you can. But

then you have to suffer the consequences. In the same sense a fish suffers consequences when he eats the food that a fisherman puts on a hook. The fish enjoys it and as a result of that gets hooked. So it's not that we are outlining some moral law here that you must hate your food and eat it like it's your only child. Do what you like, eat and enjoy if you want to.

Q: But what's the danger?

Nm: Well, exactly. You already know that there is some danger, that's the point. Why do people not like to think about the illness, their own illness or even illness of people that are dear to them? Mortality? Ageing,? Why is that? There must be something there that people don't want to admit. Well, chasing pleasure of food or otherwise is tied to that. So if you stop and think about it, you would see that maybe, "I could enjoy food, I could enjoy the senses. But what if there is a catch there?" And again, even the most untrained mind can see, even if you don't know anything about the Dhamma, no values of precepts or whatever else, everybody at some point in their life, sooner or later, thinks, "What's the point in chasing sensual desires, food or otherwise, when it only results in a very, very temporary satisfaction?"

The point is, you already have an inkling that, "Oh, so there is no end to this. And I'm kind of enslaved by it. And that's not a good position to be in. But hey, I'll forget about that because I'll chase the next desire, and next desire and next desire." And that's how people go through life. So yes, you can do that. But again, there are consequences that you will have to pay the price for. Price of eating, consuming and taking all these things up, that don't belong to you. Then at the end, the bill comes and

you realise, “Oh, now I have to pay for all of that. I thought it was mine. I thought I was the owner. I thought it was free.” But it’s not. If it were free, it wouldn’t be pressuring you so much. It wouldn’t be enticing you so much. It wouldn’t be trapping you so much, it wouldn’t be baiting you so much. There’s always a catch.

Q: **“When lust for the five types of sensual pleasure is fully understood there is no fetter bound by which the noble disciple might come back to this world.”**

Nm: Fully understanding lust and assumptions in regard to the solid food, you will fully understand and remove the ownership of the physical body that depends on the solid food, it won’t be taken as yours anymore. By fully understanding the body, and as the Buddha said in another sutta, by being fully developed in regard to your own body, you will fully overcome the lust towards the five types of sensual pleasure.

Q: **“And how is the nutriment of *phassa*/contact/pressure to be regarded? Suppose a flayed cow were to stand leaning against a wall. The creatures living in the wall would chew on it. If it were to stand leaning against a tree, the creatures living in the tree would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to water, the creatures living in the water would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to the air, the creatures living in the air would chew on it. For wherever the flayed cow were to stand exposed, the creatures living there would chew on it. In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of contact/pressure to be regarded. When the**

nutriment of contact/pressure is understood, the three feelings ,pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain are understood. When the three feelings are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do."

Nm: That's why I like to translate *phassa*/contact as pressure. It's not an impersonal, mechanical or biological "contact". It's the mental pressure. *Phassa* is the pressure to act on account of what is felt, and that's exactly how the cow is feeling. It's not just nonchalant about creatures anatomically chewing on its flesh. No, it's pressured, it's harassed, it's annoyed. It's attacked, it's being devoured, it's uncomfortable. "Contact" is uncomfortable. So do you regard *phassa* as uncomfortable or do you not even see it as a pressure at all? If that's the case, your understanding of or your idea of *phassa* is very inaccurate. And usually it's very inaccurate. People usually think, due to the whole commentarial misrepresentation which explains *phassa* as a physical coming together of the senses, sense objects and consciousness, and then 'poof!', the result of that is sight, sound,etc. As if it has nothing to do with me, and I'm not responsible for it. No, *phassa* is indeed having eyes and sights, but it's being pressured on account of what is felt in regard to that. That's where *phassa* is.

So in other words, if people want to understand *phassa*, if they want to understand the situation of that cow, then find things within your mind, where you are emotionally pressured, on account of anything, sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thought, doesn't matter. If there is pressure there, if there is discomfort there, that's where *phassa* is. And that's what needs to be

understood, not psychologically or anatomically explained in terms of sense organs and so on. That's not the *phassa*.

Imagine the cow being devoured by the insects, and you're telling it, "Oh, no, see, this is what's happening to you. In dependence on the body and bodily-touches, body-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition, feeling.", "Okay, yeah, but I'm still pressured, I still suffer. So that knowledge of the explanation of the contact is not freeing me from this discomfort. Thus, it's not the knowledge because if that knowledge truly pertains to the nature of that phenomenon, it will result in freedom from suffering, as the suttas would say." The full understanding of contact results in you being free from the pressure.

> **"Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple experiences revulsion towards the body, towards bodily phenomena, towards body-consciousness, towards body-contact, towards feeling. Experiencing revulsion, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion the mind is liberated. With its deliverance he understands: 'Assumption has been fully understood by me."**

Q: **"When the nutriment of contact/pressure is understood, the three feelings, pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain are understood."**

Nm: Exactly, because that's where the pressure is, it's where the feeling is. Fully understanding the nature of pressure, you have fully uprooted any resistance or welcoming towards respective feelings. In other words, you're completely free from craving.

Q: Through understanding.

Nm: Yes, by understanding the pressure in regard to the currently enduring feeling, not by explaining it. But by understanding its nature, that will result in complete freedom from it.

Q: I can reflect on how I am subjected to feelings…

Nm: Yes, you could, but first, you need to feel the pressure. You can start these abstract questionings and self interrogations, but you first need to feel the pressure on account of whatever feeling is present there, because it's there. Some pressure always has to be there, you can't be in-between the pressures. No, there's always something felt, which means there's always something pressuring you, big or small, doesn't matter, pressure is there. So, first, you need to stop acting out of that pressure habitually. Then allow the feeling to endure, then the phenomenon of pressure that manifests in regard to that, you can start interrogating its properties, and you can realise that in itself, the "pressure to act" is enough "in itself" it does not imply any action.

For example, an itch does not imply a scratch, you assume a scratch because you don't want the itch. You assume the 'act out of pressure to relieve the pressure' because you don't want the pressure. However, if you remove the gratuitous resistance to the pressure in itself, pressure is just the pressure, thus, it's not pressuring you anymore. But for that, the mind needs to be developed in order to see that without giving in to that subtle attitude of either, "I want this" or "I don't want this". And the only way to develop the mind to see such subtlety, it needs to be able to endure the pressure sufficiently. You don't need to find

the right second or moment in-between pressure, so to catch your resistance before it happens. No. How do you become imperturbable? By practising not being perturbed, through enduring? You stop moving and the pressure to move will fade away because you're not feeding it anymore. You also don't practise immovability in regard to everything and nothing? No, in regard to the pressure that's there on account of what you're currently feeling, that's where you practice endurance/*khanti*.

You need to find that level of presently enduring feeling, and don't move there. Everything else is fine, everything else is second to it, everything else will fall in place, if you uproot the craving on the level where it matters.

Q: **"And how is the nutriment of mental intention to be regarded? Suppose there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than a man's height, full of embers that were neither flaming nor smoking, and a man were to come along — loving life, hating death, loving pleasure, resisting pain — and two strong men, having grabbed him by the arms, were to drag him to the pit of embers. To get far away would be that man's intention, far away would be his wish, far away would be his aspiration. Why is that? Because he would realize, 'If I fall into this pit of glowing embers, I will meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain.' In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of mental intention to be regarded. When the nutriment of mental intention is understood, the three forms of craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being are understood. When the three forms of**

craving are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.

Nm: What would be a practical example of mental intention?

Q: I want to go…

Nm: I want. That's it. Wanting. I want this, I don't want that. Now, you can think, "Oh, okay, I don't want my wanting or I don't want anything.", but you can't not want your wanting to be free of wanting because that's now what you want. So you can't just want your way out of your desire. The problem with the attitude of wanting is whether it pertains to the five cords of sensual pleasure, one way or the other, subtle or coarse. Is your wanting still pertaining to your gratuitous assumption of safety in this world? Is it still based on the gratuitous assumption of ownership, your own sense of self. Are those wants still revolving around those things? Because that is what needs to change.

That's why the Buddha encourages us to replace the joys of sensual life with the joys of renunciate life, of a life that says no to sensuality. You can replace the miseries, the suffering of the sensual life with the suffering of the renunciate life because it's better. The experiencing of joys and miseries for as long as you have the body, is not optional. But what's optional is what joys and miseries will be experienced, whether they're going to be pure or not, whether they're going to be causing more attachment or not, whether they're going to be causing more infatuation and lust or not. So replace the sensual ones with the renunciate ones and sustain that and there will be no more problems for you.

You can want anything else except the five cords sensual pleasures, for example. That's it. Sustain that context and you will overcome lust or sensuality, because you're not feeding it anymore through gratuitous sustaining of wanting it, i.e. valuing it.

The joys of seclusion are used to replace the joys of a household life. Pains of seclusion, pains of renunciation, replace the pains of a household life, which are far worse, far more burdening and create much further reaching consequences. Things you do on account of sensuality now, will have many consequences in lives to come, not just in this one. But pains of seclusion, renunciation pretty much end there, because there's nothing done on account of it. No other people are affected by it, so it does not carry the same significance. And yet you used it to now replace all this other burden that would have otherwise have caused you so much more hassle.

That's the mental wanting. It's not like you cannot have it, but you should certainly make sure that none of it is rooted in the domain of the senses, in the domain of assumption of ownership. Is your wanting based on getting more pleasure, or a gratuitous sense of safety? Or is your wanting based on the practicality for living the holy life? Do you want enough food, enough shelter? Enough robes or clothes? Enough means to live by? Or is your wanting based on much more than that? So it's about replacing the bad wanting with good wanting, and then sustaining the good wanting until you can completely disown even that.

Q: Why is it called nutriment?

Nm: Well, because your sense of self, your being, all of your assumptions are fed by it, dependent on it, sustained by it. Whether you want it or not, through acting on it, you're feeding it. It's a direct nutriment for *bhava*, for ego, for conceit, for ownership. It's a vicious circle.

There are four types of nutriment and what's in common with all those nutriments, is that they are nutriments for *bhava*, for your sense of self when you take them wrongly. So the one who is free from nutriment of food is free from *bhava* to that extent. An arahant doesn't stop eating food, but eating food ceases to be the nutriment for his being because he has seen the danger in it. There is no wanting anymore, no desire, no lust in regard to the nutriment of food. Thus, it has ceased to be the nutriment for *bhava*, nutriment for his being and misconceptions. There is no more pressure either. Pressure was your wrong attitude which has been uprooted. As I said, "itch" is enough in itself, it does not require a scratch nor even imply it.

Q: But it's still an itch

Nm: There is still an itch, but it does not pressure towards scratching it's just an itch. So when you are not developed in regard to the itch, your mind cannot resist the thoughts, the delight, the pressure, the possibility of the scratch-to remove the itch. The itch in itself is self sufficient. It's enough. In the itch there is just the itch. And if you start seeing it like that, you will not be pressured to scratch it. The pressure of scratching it will fade away.

As the Buddha said, *phassa*/pressure cannot pressure the groundless one. The one that has no ground for that pressure to land, no ownership, no delight, no lust in those thoughts of,

“what if I only scratch it..”, none of that, he completely disowned them all, thus the thoughts of scratching do not pressure him anymore. The itch is there. The thoughts of scratching might be there but there is no pressure to scratch and then even the thoughts of scratching will fade away. And then again in the itch there’s just the itch, in the seen there’s just the seen, in the heard, just the heard and so on.

Q: **“And how is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded? Suppose that, having arrested a thief, a criminal, they were to show him to the king: ‘This is a thief, a criminal for you, your majesty. Impose on him whatever punishment you like.’ So the king would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears. Then the king would say at noon, ‘Men, how is that man?’ ‘Still alive, your majesty.’ So the king would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him at noon with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him at noon with a hundred spears. Then the king would say in the evening, ‘Men, how is that man?’ ‘Still alive, your majesty.’ So the king would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears. Now what do you think, monks: Would that man, being shot with three hundred spears a day, experience pain and distress from that cause?” “Even if he were to be shot with only one spear, lord, he would experience pain and distress from that cause, to say nothing of three hundred spears.” “In the same way, I tell you, monks, is the nutriment of consciousness to be**

regarded. When the nutriment of consciousness is understood, name and form are understood. When name and form are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do."

Nm: What's the property of consciousness, practically speaking? What do all those things have in common? They are cognized. It's the subtlest nutriment to understand. By understanding the nutriment food, you can be an anagami, but there will still be subtler forms of lust and aversion for "being","non-being" and remnants of conceit. Consciousness is the subtlest type of nutriment to understand because it's on the level of the mere cognizing of things.

Are you cognizing those things with the implication of "for me", "mine", "I am"? Or are you cognizing those things as "not for me", "not mine", "not I am"? Just like the Buddha encouraged the noble disciples to regard everything.

Q: Why the simile of spears?

Nm: Any form of cognising already carries the conceit of "for me and mine". So the only way to penetrate through that is to, again, just like the other similes, to regard it as the most horrible, perilous thing in the world, that must not be wanted, and then sustaining that context as the framework for any cognizing that arises until that cognizing is purified (of all conceivings), but you can't do it on the level of cognizing it's just too subtle. And your tool for doing it is cognizing, which is already corrupted by conceivings, by conceit.

What you can do is develop the framework of, “Okay, so any form of cognition, any situation I become self aware in, is like being struck with a spear, it’s a peril, a pain, the possibility of death”. So, what next? Nothing except sustaining that attitude and context, and there will be no more basis for passion and lust to endure and proliferate. It’s like the simile of “heating up a frying pan”, when the pan is really hot, even if you throw a lot of water on it, it will evaporate very quickly. That’s how you get rid of the conceit that’s affecting your cognition, by providing a hot pan for it to evaporate. The context is the hot pan of dispassion. The context should be, “This cognising is a spear that I might die as a result of”.

Ask yourself, “What is my current situation? What is my current state of mind? What is my current enduring feeling? What’s my current body posture?” All of that is a form of cognizing. So on that general level, that peripheral level, not on the particular level of, “I’m cognizing the table, I’m cognising the book, I’m cognising the phone,…” No, “I’m cognizing my current situation of such and such feeling enduring and I’m sitting here”, that’s the spear. The broadest context you can find is the spear, and that’s how you can then broaden even that context. Broaden in a sense of developing it further, so it becomes even more unsuitable for passion, for carelessness, for ownership. And if you find that unpleasant, it’s only unpleasant because of your ownership that is still there. If there is no ownership, it will not be unpleasant.

Same like when you put disinfecting alcohol on your skin. Unless your skin is broken and infected, it won’t hurt. It hurts only because there is a wound. But if you’re really unwise you will think, “It hurts because of alcohol, thus I won’t put the

disinfectant on. I will just let the wound stay because I don't want it to hurt." When you develop the context and it hurts, it hurts because there is a wound which means if the wound heals, it will stop hurting without you needing to abandon the context.

Q: **"When the nutriment of consciousness is understood, name and form are understood. When name and form are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do."**

Nm: If you fully developed the context of dispassion in regard to anything that can be cognized, there will be no more passion. In the cognised there will be just the cognised.

PĀLI GLOSSARY

- *anāpānasati* — mindfulness of breathing
- *akusala* — unwholesome
- *anāgāmi* — non-returner
- *avijjā* — ignorance
- *bhava* — existence, being
- *bhāvanā* — development
- *dosa* — aversion
- *dukkha* — displeasure, suffering, pain
- *jhāna* — meditation
- *kamma* — action
- *kalyāṇamitta* — spiritual friend
- *kusala* — wholesome
- *lobha* — greed
- *maraṇasati* — mindfulness of death
- *moha* — delusion, distraction
- *nibbāna* — extinction
- *Pātimokkha* — Monks' Discipline
- *puthujjana* — commoner, worldling
- *samatha* — calm
- *samādhi* — composure
- *sammādiṭṭhi* — right view
- *saṃsāra* — wandering on
- *satipaṭṭhāna* — foundations of mindfulness
- *sotāpanna* — stream-enterer
- *silā* — virtue, precepts
- *taṇhā* — craving
- *vipāka* — result (of action)
- *vipassanā* — contemplation

ABBREVIATIONS

- DN — *Dīgha Nikāya*
- MN — *Majjhima Nikāya*
- SN — *Saṃyutta Nikāya*
- AN — *Aṅguttara Nikāya*
- Thag. — *Theragāthā*